

THE NEGOTIATION OF GENDER AND POWER IN MEDIEVAL GERMAN WRITINGS

by

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on insights from feminist scholarship and gender studies, this thesis offers a new reading of selected medieval German texts with a special emphasis on the negotiation of gender and power. All three parts of the thesis demonstrate how the use of modern theories helps us to re-examine a medieval text's implications and ethical values, and to reconsider traditional views of the text.

Part One focuses on the discussion of gender boundaries. Didactic and fictional texts, such as Thomasin von Zerclaere's *Der welsche Gast* and Ulrich von Liechtenstein's *Frauendienst*, show that violations of gender boundaries and the questioning of the traditional power relationship between the genders are crucial to the textual negotiation of masculinity and femininity. As I demonstrate in Part Two, the unequal relationship between men and women is especially important for the system of male homosocial bonding underlying medieval society. Examples of the physical and symbolic exchange of women and their favours are offered by didactic texts, such as Marquard vom Stein's *Der Ritter vom Turn*, and fictional texts, such as the *Nibelungenlied*. Aspects of this exchange are not solely related to medieval marriage practices, but are also reflected in courtly rituals, such as "frouwen schouwen" (watching the ladies). The importance of the conventionally beautiful female body as an object of exchange becomes obvious in Part Three, where I examine encounters between Christian knights and women defying the norms of feminine beauty. Here I focus on female figures that are defined as "doubly Other": both in their relationship to the masculine Self, and in their relationship to the ideal of medieval Christian femininity. Texts such as *Wolfdietrich B* and Der Stricker's *Die Königin vom*

Mohrenland show how the negotiation of gender and power assumes a new dimension in light of male encounters with Wild Women, heathen women, "supernatural" women and old women, where the male partner often has to struggle to uphold his privileged masculine position.

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INTRODUCTION

*Have you any notion how many books
are written about women in the course of one year?
Have you any notion how many are written by men?
Are you aware that you are, perhaps, the most
discussed animal in the universe?*

Virginia Woolf¹

*Normally the task of the historian is to
piece together an account of what happened from the
available sources, offer some analysis of the causes and
effects involved, and present his or her findings in the
most accessible form to readers or students. In a case
like the present one [...] this task is enormously more
complicated, because many readers, rather than being
eager for the information to be thus gathered and
relayed, will be inclined to resist it.*

John Boswell²

1. Gender under Discussion

In the year 1970 Kate Millett introduced the concept of "sexual politics," which proposed that sex was "a status category with political implications."³ For this purpose she had to expand the term "politics" so that it now described not only the "exclusive world of meetings,

¹Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929; London: Flamingo, 1994), 31.

²John Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* (New York: Villard Books, 1994), xxvii.

³Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Doubleday & Co, 1970), 24.

chairmen and parties," but all kinds of "power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another."⁴ Together with Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1927), Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), Katharine M. Rogers's *The Troublesome Helpmate* (1966)⁵ and Mary Ellmann's *Thinking about Women* (1968),⁶ Millett's work constitutes the basis of Anglo-American feminist literary criticism, which followed in the wake of the newly surfacing Anglo-American political feminist movement in the 1960s,⁷ usually referred to as the "second wave" of feminism.

One of the most important concepts discussed in current feminist writings is the concept of patriarchy. Although this term has been defined in a variety of ways, most feminists agree that patriarchy is based upon structures of male domination and female subordination. Kate Millett, for example, describes patriarchy as a historical societal structure in which "the military, industry, technology, universities, science, political office, and finance, in short, every avenue of power within the society, including the coercive force of the police, is entirely in male hands."⁸ According to Millett, patterns of male domination and female subordination are to be found in their most intimate and pervasive form in personal, sexual relationships between the two genders. Since the family as the instance of primary

⁴Ibid., 23.

⁵Mary Ellmann, *Thinking about Women* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968).

⁶Katherine M. Rogers, *The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature* (Seattle: U of Washington Press, 1966).

⁷Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1985), 21-22.

⁸Millett, 25.

socialization is the first authority to enforce gender-based notions of power and subordination, the private world of the family is closely interconnected with the political world, thus giving testimony to the powerful feminist insight that the "personal is political." The initiation of children into the societal norms of femininity and masculinity is in itself a highly political act, and it can be said that "sexual politics" quite literally start in the cradle. The much more frequent killing of female, as compared to male, offspring in many historical (and some contemporary) societies is probably the most drastic example of this kind of sexual politics, but there are other, less horrifying signals, like the distinction between male and female infants by colours such as "blue" and "pink," colours which may translate directly into a different form and amount of attention parents pay to their children depending on their gender.⁹

Even though Millett's definition of patriarchy is certainly not the only one to be considered, it is especially powerful in that it conveys the notion that, as Mary Daly formulates it, patriarchy is a colonizing force, that "appears to be 'everywhere.:'"

Even outer space and the future have been colonized. [...] Nor does this colonization exist simply "outside" women's minds, securely fastened into institutions we can physically leave behind. Rather, it is also internalized,

⁹See for example Judith S. Bridges, "Pink or Blue: Gender-Stereotypic Perceptions of Infants as Conveyed by Birth Congratulations Cards," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 17 (1993): 204. The degree to which the colours "blue" and "pink" are commonly associated with masculinity and femininity may also be deduced from the fact that "lavender" as the colour "in between" has come to signify a state of violation of gender categories and is usually attached to homosexuals. See Venetia Newall, "Folklore and Male Homosexuality," *Folklore* 97 (1986): 126.

festering inside women's heads, even feminists heads.¹⁰

The Christian religion plays a most important role in the internalization and re-enforcement of patriarchy in the Western world. As will be seen later in this thesis, the relationship between a patriarchal God and his "children" is reflected in the relationship between the male head of the family and his wife, children and servants. Moreover, as Bryan S. Turner has pointed out, one should not overlook the connection between patriarchal religion and specific economic household-structures:

The broad religious background to patriarchal ideology [...] regards women as by nature emotional, irrational and unstable. This religious view suggests that women's natural passions are more potent than their powers of reason: Eve's body governs Eve's mind. The history of Christian attitudes toward women is thus powerful evidence of the validity of the feminist argument that women are subordinated in society by an ideology which treats women as closer to nature than to culture. What supports this patriarchal ideology is, however, the control of property within the household so that, in practice, it is difficult to separate patriarchy and gerontocracy.¹¹

The notion of patriarchy's overwhelming presence holds especially true for the European Middle Ages, a pre-capitalistic time, when the rule of the father was still very personal and direct. It was, as even socialist and Marxist feminists such as Heidi Hartmann

¹⁰Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), 1.

¹¹Bryan S. Turner, *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 135-36.

and Zillah Eisenstein argue, only with the beginning of capitalism that rigid patriarchal family structures started to soften:

... before capitalism , a patriarchal system was established in which men controlled the labor of women and children in the family, and [...] in so doing men learned the techniques of hierarchical organization and control. [...] The emergence of capitalism in the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries threatened patriarchal control based on institutional authority as it destroyed many old institutions and created new ones, such as the "free" market in labor.¹²

Despite these changes, however, patriarchy did not disappear, but only changed its shape.

Although Ann Ferguson maintains that industrialization in the nineteenth century gave some women an independent income and thus the chance to escape the control of the patriarchal family,¹³ others paint a less optimistic picture. Eisenstein, for example, formulates it succinctly:

Although the specific historical emphasis of patriarchal controls has shifted from the "father" to the "husband" to the "state" (while simultaneously remaining rooted in each), the dynamic of sexual class --the process of hierarchically differentiating woman from man-- constructs the continuity of

¹²Heidi Hartmann, "Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Job Segregation by Sex," in *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*, ed. Zillah R. Eisenstein (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1979), 207.

¹³Ann Ferguson, *Sexual Democracy: Women, Oppression, and Revolution* (Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press, 1991), 61.

patriarchy.¹⁴

Hartmann sees job segregation as the "primary mechanism in capitalist society that maintains the superiority of men over women because it enforces lower wages for women on the labor market."¹⁵ Because of these lower wages, Hartmann argues, women are often forced into marriage. The domestic tasks they have to fulfil in their function as wife (and mother) in return puts them at a disadvantage on the job market. And even Ferguson, despite her emphasis on women's potential opportunities under capitalism, acknowledges that freedom from the patriarchal family only too easily translated into an "independent, if often impoverished, life in the cities."¹⁶

Even though in the Middle Ages some women also managed to escape direct patriarchal control (more often than not by default, like for example medieval widows), these women constituted a minority who, like their nineteenth-century counterparts, often had to pay for their independence with economic hardship. The majority of medieval women, regardless of their social status, spent their lives under the strict supervision of male authorities, most often fathers and husbands, though sometimes adult sons. It is, as the above quoted feminists point out, the direct, personal control of the patriarchal family over women that determined most medieval women's lives--a fact that is also reflected in many of the literary texts I will examine in this thesis.

¹⁴Zillah R. Eisenstein, *Feminism and Sexual Equality: Crisis in Liberal America* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984), 90.

¹⁵Hartmann, 208.

¹⁶Ferguson, 60.

The categories of sex and gender have been subject to a process of critical rethinking by feminist scholars since the 1970s and today constitute one of the main fundamentals of feminist theory.¹⁷ If we accept that gender is primarily the result of cultural construction, and that "the distinctions between male and female bodies are mapped by cultural politics onto only apparently clear biological foundations,"¹⁸ we find sufficient explanation for the variety of gender-definitions encountered in different cultures. Although most cultures purport a sex/gender system that is based on binary oppositions between men and women, definitions of femininity and masculinity may vary considerably in different societies:

All societies, it appears, manifest some gender asymmetry--that is, men and women have different roles and carry out different tasks--but the qualities, roles, and tasks accorded to men and women vary enormously across time and culture and may bear no relationship to what we consider appropriate to the sexes in our own society.¹⁹

Epstein and Straub emphasize the inherent instability of gender norms when they claim that "designations of 'normative' or 'transgressive' are always historically and culturally relative, enormously unstable and labile, and highly indicative of threatened ideological positions."²⁰

The concept of masculinity is perceived as especially endangered, due to what Jo Ann

¹⁷Carole S. Vance, "Social Construction Theory and Sexuality," in *Constructing Masculinity*, ed. Maurice Berger et al. (London, New York: Routledge, 1995), 37-48.

¹⁸Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub, ed., *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity* (New York, London: Routledge, 1991), 2.

¹⁹Sara Lennox, "Feminist Scholarship and *Germanistik*," *German Quarterly* 62 (1989): 158.

²⁰Epstein and Straub, 3.

McNamara calls its "weaker biological underpinnings"--a biological fact that has resulted in a history of ideological underpinnings of masculinity:

It requires strong social support to maintain fictions of superiority based solely on a measure of physical strength. The assignment of social roles and status on the basis of biological sex has customarily been justified as resting on a bedrock of natural law, decreed by God and nature and therefore beyond the reach of historical change.²¹

Because of its inherent instability, it is important to approach the question of gender historically. Epstein and Straub warn us to avoid "the trap of universalizing our present moment into an always/already, seemingly stable construction."²² To examine, for example, "medieval masculinities," as Clare A. Lees does in her anthology of the same title,²³ proves to be useful in a double sense. First, the reader becomes aware of the historicity of concepts such as masculinity and femininity and the often long tradition that stands behind them--a tradition that has to be kept in mind when attempting to evaluate their present form. Second, the fact that a historical period such as the Middle Ages offers readings of the concepts of masculinity and femininity that are different from those of the twentieth century, points to the principal instability of these concepts. For example, the strong Judeo-Christian Biblical

²¹Jo Ann McNamara, "The *Herrenfrage*: The Restructuring of the Gender System, 1050-1150," in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Clare A. Lees (Minneapolis, London: U of Minnesota Press, 1994), 3.

²²Epstein and Straub, 6.

²³Clare A. Lees, ed., *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, London: U of Minnesota Press, 1994).

tradition concerning the relationship between the genders constitutes the basis of the now 2000 year old Christian European definition of gender and gender relations, and thus creates a continuum between past and present. On the other hand, this continuum, although never actually disrupted, takes on the character of its specific historical period and is thus being continually reshaped. One only has to compare the female dress code of the last century with that of our time in order to realize how the cultural expression of gender roles can shift.

What seems to have remained relatively stable throughout history is the connection between gender and power. It is certainly no exaggeration to claim that femininity in most historical and contemporary societies is regarded as biologically and, very often, morally inferior to masculinity, which accounts for the male's usually superior position in the relationship between the genders as well as in society in general. Joan Scott's twofold definition of gender as a "constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes and [...] a primary way of signifying relationships of power"²⁴ emphasizes this connection between (biological) difference and (societal) power. As Part One of this thesis demonstrates, the mutual dependence of (biological) difference and (societal) power becomes most obvious in cases in which one of the two components is being violated. Historical and literary examples from the European Middle Ages show that inhabiting the inferior position in the relationship between the genders "pushes" a man out of the realm of masculinity, emasculates him, "makes" him a "social woman." On the other hand, as especially the example of female saints indicates, the renouncing of her "inferior" femininity

²⁴Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91 (1986): 1067.

can gain a woman the societal power usually reserved for the male.

As already indicated above, politics are not restricted to sexuality and the socio-political realm of society, but they also constitute a part of literature, indeed any kind of written document. As Judith Fetterley rightfully points out, "literature is political. It is painful to have to insist on this fact, but the necessity of such insistence indicates the dimensions of the problem."²⁵ The one reality that is "encouraged, legitimized, and transmitted"²⁶ automatically appears to be representative of reality *per se*. Yet, while insisting on its objectivity, mainstream literature only obscures the fact that it is built of similar personal and subjective components as are often ascribed to marginalized forms of representation. Mainstream culture has an "agenda" no less than cultural expressions of less conventional or non-conventional viewpoints, even though this agenda is simply seen as the "norm." And also in the politics of literature, power plays a dominant role. With respect to the question of gender relations, literature has the power not only to decide *whom* to represent and *whose* experience to promote as typical, normal, universal etc., but also *how* to represent its chosen world-view:

To be excluded from a literature that claims to define one's identity is to experience a particular form of powerlessness--not only the powerlessness which derives from not seeing one's experience articulated, clarified, and legitimized in art, but more significantly the powerlessness which results from

²⁵Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1977), xi.

²⁶*Ibid.*, xi.

the endless division of self against self, the consequence of the invocation to identify as male while being reminded that to be male--to be universal, to be American--is to be *not female*. Not only does powerlessness characterize woman's experience of reading, it also describes the content of what is read.²⁷

In a similar way the acts of reading, teaching and (re-)viewing are political. As David Aers puts it, "the present readings of texts and history, like all others, are conditioned by specific social and institutional circumstances as they are by the readers' preoccupations, critical theory and overall ideology."²⁸ Aers quotes Frank Lentricchia's observation that a "perfectly objective interpretation is possible only if the interpreter is a transcendental being--that is, if he [sic!] is not human."²⁹ Reading transgresses the boundaries between the private and the public and becomes political when it is involved in cultural acts such as teaching or (re-)viewing. Teachers as well as (re-)viewers act as public judges on cultural productions and can often have a direct influence on reading matters; both have the power to decide whether a text "will receive a role in the public domain, or whether it will be consigned to silence, at once."³⁰ Even though a reader might not be aware of or refuse to acknowledge his or her presuppositions, these presuppositions do exist and render any act of reading, teaching or (re-)viewing political.

²⁷Ibid., xiii.

²⁸David Aers, "Introduction," in *Medieval Literature, Criticism and History*, ed. David Aers (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1986), 1

²⁹Ibid., 2.

³⁰Ibid., 3.

These insights are no less valid with respect to earlier literary periods, such as the European Middle Ages. In medieval literature, there are many works that illustrate man's dominion over woman. The notion that literature serves predominantly male needs holds true even in cases where male authors write texts for or dedicate them to a female audience, as was often the case in medieval religious literature. Herbert Grundmann in his essay "Die Frauen und die Literatur im Mittelalter" points to the many religious texts, such as psalters, *Mariendichtungen* and mystical literature,

für Frauen geschaffen und auf die besondere Eigenart weiblicher Frömmigkeit abgestimmt: auf die Hinneigung zur Marienverehrung, auf die Empfänglichkeit für die Gedanken der Seelenbrautschaft, auf die *minnichliche gotes erkenntnisse*.³¹

It certainly speaks for the importance of the female readership of the Middle Ages that authors took the effort to make religious literature more accessible for a female audience not only through the use of the vernacular, but through their consideration of the special features of female devotion. Like female religious authors themselves, male authors writing for women certainly added a "feminine" touch to the Christian teaching of their time and managed to make the Church more accommodating for women and their specific modes of religious expression. It should not be overlooked, however, that the male authors' interest in promoting women's understanding of specific types of religious literature, "Psalter nämlich

³¹Herbert Grundmann, "Die Frauen und die Literatur im Mittelalter," in *Ausgewählte Aufsätze*, ed. Herbert Grundmann, vol. 3 (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1978), 74: "composed for women and tuned to the special needs of female devotion, to their inclination toward the worship of the Virgin Mary, their susceptibility to notions of the bridehood of the soul, and their 'loving insight into God.'"

und alle Bücher, die zum Dienste Gottes gehören"³² was primarily strategic. Not unlike some of the didactic works I discuss later in this thesis, religious literature composed for female readers ultimately served the interests of medieval patriarchal society by educating the female readers in the predominantly masculine ideology of the Christian Church. Caviness's word of caution concerning the conclusions one can draw from medieval women's ownership of books is especially important with respect to devotional literature:

Yet the books women owned, and which were even made for them, were often given to them by men, who are the real donors or patrons; it follows that the images of the women owners in such books do not constitute self-representations, any more than the images in modern so-called women's magazines; there are cases where one might prefer to say they were made "against" rather than "for" women.³³

A similar argument can be made for many female religious writers of that time whose subversive potential was hampered by the fact that they were members of the Christian Church and in one way or the other subscribed to, or at least accepted, the Church's teaching about women and gender relations:

The restrictedness of women's roles, and their subjection to male ecclesiastical authority, are fundamental facts that no study of these women can ignore. The exclusion of women from the priesthood, and even from

³²Ibid., 71: "psalters and all the books that belong to the service of God."

³³Madeline H. Caviness, "Anchoress, Abbess, and Queen: Donors and Patrons or Intercessors and Matrons?", in *The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women*, ed. June Hall McCash (Athens and London: The U of Georgia Press, 1996), 106.

preaching, was firm. Furthermore [...] for the Middle Ages the "religious life" was by definition a life under the monastic disciplines and structures that were part of the Church's total order. Consequently the story of the "movement" of women's piety in the High Middle Ages, when viewed as a whole, becomes almost inescapably an account of how women were incorporated into those disciplines and structures.³⁴

In analyzing literature, the reader today can make use of many and diverse analytical tools offered by the several streams into which feminist literary criticism has divided in response to the various interests and needs of different groups of women. Maggie Humm in her recent introduction to feminist literary criticism offers the readers eight different approaches (which sometimes overlap): "Myth criticism," "Marxist / Socialist-feminist criticism," "French feminist criticism," "Psychoanalytic criticism," "Poststructuralism / deconstruction / postmodernism," "Black feminism," "Lesbian feminist criticism" and "Third World feminist criticism."³⁵ Yet, as Humm herself acknowledges, her categories are artificial and should be used as points of orientation only, rather than as fixed characterizations of the critics and their approaches. As I have shown above, my main tool, the concept of gender, is a feminist key-issue that in one way or another underlies all of these approaches. In a similar way, the concept of patriarchy has been discussed and developed by critics of different groups, such as feminist theologians or socialist and Marxist feminists. The same holds true

³⁴E. Ann Matter and John Coakley, eds., *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy: A Religious and Artistic Renaissance* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 3.

³⁵Maggie Humm, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Feminist Literary Criticism* (New York, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994). v-vii.

for the concept of Otherness, which has become important not only for anthropologists (feminist or otherwise), but also for (feminist) psychologists, linguists, political scientists, and indeed also for literary critics.

Yet, since Humm's categorization does not always account for the whole range of their work, it does not necessarily reveal much about my specific use of these critics. Although it is important to have some kind of mental landscape of feminist criticism and to be able to roughly locate the individual approaches, I have tried to keep an open mind and heeded Humm's own advice to categorize the reading experiences not as "types or levels, but more as moments in a single reading."³⁶ As my overview of similar projects in medieval German literature criticism in Part 1.2. demonstrates, if used sensibly and sensitively, feminist literary criticism can be not only immensely fruitful for the exploration and understanding of medieval texts, but can at the same time highlight the continuing relevance of medieval literature for a modern audience. To use E. Jane Burns formulation: "If medieval texts appear to the modern reader somewhat distanced and inaccessible due to a language barrier that marks their specific historicity, these tales are not at all distanced from us in their theoretical concerns."³⁷

³⁶Ibid., 26.

³⁷E. Jane Burns, *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 6.

2. Feminist Criticism and the Concept of Gender in Medieval German Literature: An Overview of the Debate

"Despite the valiant efforts of the feminist scholars of Women in German, gender is still not widely employed within *Germanistik* as a category of literary analysis," Sara Lennox remarked in 1989.³⁸ Considering that Lennox is referring here to the whole range of German literature, from Old High German fragments to the highly complex and diverse literary forms and expressions of the late twentieth century, one will hardly be surprised to find that the medieval period has not been the main focus of even the little attention that has been paid to contemporary gender theories in the field of German literature. Yet this negligence on the part of scholars is restricted neither to feminist literary theory nor to the *German* language part of medieval literature. The French scholar Eugene Vance in his introduction to Paul Zumthor's *Speaking of the Middle Ages* depicts the Middle Ages as

an epoch that has been, on the one hand, grievously sequestered from modern critical thought by medievalists themselves and, on the other, ignored by antihistorical linguists and theoreticians of the 1960s and '70s who have staunchly declined to investigate the rich medieval underpinnings of their own thought.³⁹

Yet, despite many prejudices and difficulties, the last decade has witnessed some attempts by scholars in medieval and early modern German literature to take advantage of feminist

³⁸Lennox, 158.

³⁹Eugene Vance, foreword to *Speaking of the Middle Ages*, by Paul Zumthor, trans. Sarah White (Lincoln & London: U of Nebraska Press, 1986), ix.

critical thought and methods. Albrecht Classen in the introduction to his anthology *Women as Protagonists and Poets in the German Middle Ages* (1990)⁴⁰ offers a detailed overview of feminist approaches to medieval German literature in which he points not only to the developing trend of feminist research in the previous years, but also to vast areas yet uncovered. According to Classen, especially the field of female mystical writing has become the object of considerable attention, probably because it constitutes the main field of Middle High German woman poets. Consequently, a number of contributions to his anthology are devoted to the topic of female religious-mystical writing, ranging from the question of religious women and literary traditions (Debra L. Stoudt) and spiritual autobiographies of medieval holy women (Ute Stargardt) to the investigation of individual authors such as Mechthild von Magdeburg and her contribution to medieval German *Frauenmystik* (Gabriele Strauch).

The depiction of women in medieval texts authored by men has been a second field of feminist investigation. Especially two authors in Classen's anthology employ some of the analytical tools offered by feminist literary criticism in order to arrive at a better understanding of their texts. Valerie R. Hotchkiss's article, "Disguise and Despair: The Life of Hildegund von Schönau,"⁴¹ offers a fascinating analysis of the way in which Hildegund's psychological struggle between masculine gender role and feminine gender identity shines

⁴⁰Albrecht Classen, ed., *Women as Protagonists and Poets in the German Middle Ages: An Anthology of Feminist Approaches to Middle High German Literature* (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1991).

⁴¹Valerie Hotchkiss, "Disguise and Despair: The Life of Hildegund von Schönau," in *Women as Protagonists*, 29-41.

through in the accounts of her male biographers. The positive reaction of all four biographers to the miracle of Hildegund's femininity, revealed after her death, and Hotchkiss's interpretation of the sudden re-appearance of Hildegund's menstruation and her subsequent death by uterine haemorrhaging as a sign of and punishment for her "desire, instilled by the devil, to return to her womanly (i.e. sinful) nature,"⁴² is compelling, and supports her thesis of the exceptional role of religious women in medieval society.

Wenda Sterba in her essay "The Question of Enite's Transgression: Female Voice and Male Gaze as Determining Factors in Hartmann's Erec" says less about the male gaze (as it is understood in modern psychoanalytical terms) than about the female voice. Employing Kaja Silverman's theory of the female voice as the basis of her interpretation of the figure of Enite, Sterba defines Enite's development in the story as that of a woman who manages to find and successfully use her (female) voice. The term "male gaze," as Sterba uses it, refers to Erec's need to "see beyond his own limited self-enclosure to his social responsibilities and to the need of others."⁴³ It is this specific insight that constitutes the final aim of Erec's learning experience.

The anthology *Der frauen buoch: Versuche zu einer feministischen Mediävistik*,⁴⁴ edited by Ingrid Bennewitz in 1989, presents eighteen articles, two of which work explicitly with feminist approaches. Ingvild Birkhan in her essay "Genesis und Ödipus: Die zweifache

⁴²Ibid., 39.

⁴³Wendy Sterba, "The Question of Enite's Transgression: Female Voice and Male Gaze as Determining Factors in Hartmann's Erec," in *Women as Protagonists*, 67.

⁴⁴Ingrid Bennewitz, *Der frauen buoch: Versuche zu einer feministischen Mediävistik*. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik 517 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1989).

Verwerfung der Frau"⁴⁵ relies on the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Lacan. Birkhan discusses two *Ursprungsmythen*, the biblical account in Genesis and Freud's *Ödipus*. While Genesis describes the process of becoming human, Freud's *Ödipus* centres on the process of growing up. Both Genesis and Freud's *Ödipus* discuss the socialization of the human being, situated between mother and father, man and woman. Ingrid Bennewitz's article on the presentation of the rape of Lucretia in the Middle High German *Kaiserchronik* and the *Ritter vom Thurn*⁴⁶ is based primarily on Susan Brownmiller's classic study of rape, *Against Our Will*. Bennewitz focuses on the literary projections of male power and female powerlessness, symbolized by the act of rape. In her interpretation, rape appears as a "männerspezifische Form der Demütigung und Unterwerfung"⁴⁷ that is only rarely judged negatively by the narrators.

Arthurian Romance and Gender, an anthology edited by Friedrich Wolfzettel in 1995, comprises the selected Proceedings of the XVIIth International Arthurian Congress, and features article on French, English and German medieval literature, written in these three languages.⁴⁸ Among the three essays dealing with Middle High German literature, especially

⁴⁵Ingvild Birkhan, "Genesis und Ödipus: Die zweifache Verwerfung der Frau," in *Der frauwen buoch*, 1-45.

⁴⁶Ingrid Bennewitz, "Lukretia, oder: Über die literarischen Projektionen von der Macht der Männer und der Ohnmacht der Frauen. Darstellung und Bewertung von Vergewaltigung in der 'Kaiserchronik' und im 'Ritter vom Thurn,'" in *Der frauwen buoch*, 113-134.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 124: "... specifically masculine way of humiliation and subjugation."

⁴⁸Friedrich Wolfzettel, *Arthurian Romance and Gender: Selected Proceedings of the XVIIth Congress*, Internationale Forschungen zur allgemeinen und vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft 10 (Amsterdam-Atlanta, Ga: Rodopi, 1995).

Susann Samples's "The Rape of Ginover in Heinrich von dem Türlin's *Diu Crône*"⁴⁹ provides a variety of fascinating insights into the presentation of gender relations, highlighted by the example of violence against women and rape. Samples's analysis of the rape of Ginover focuses on the narrative devices used by the author in order to diminish the "heinousness of this sexual assault."⁵⁰ The male point of view and the skilful combination of *minne* and siege imagery not only draw the reader's attention away from the suffering of the female victim, but at the same time point to the "fluid boundaries existing between courtship, sex, and violence."⁵¹

Jerold Frakes's book *Brides and Doom: Gender, Property and Power in Medieval German Women's Epic* (1994)⁵² is admittedly provocative, yet insightful. Frakes analyzes three Middle High German epics, the *Nibelungenlied*, the *Klage* and *Kudrun*. As the book's subtitle already indicates, the category of gender is employed as a main tool in the analysis of these works. As I will show in greater detail in my own discussion of the *Nibelungenlied* in Part Two of this thesis, Frakes highlights the importance of the connection between gender and power especially in his analysis of the strategies of male bonding depicted, and of the role women play, in this process. At the same time, Frakes consciously attempts to distinguish his critical approach from traditional philological-patriarchal scholarship, or as he

⁴⁹Susann Samples, "The Rape of Ginover in Heinrich von dem Türlin's *Diu Crône*," in *Arthurian Romance and Gender*, 196-205.

⁵⁰Ibid., 196.

⁵¹Ibid., 199.

⁵²Jerold C. Frakes, *Brides and Doom: Gender, Property, and Power in Medieval German Women's Epic* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania Press, 1994).

formulates it rather ironically, from the "hallowed traditions of philological scholarship, passed down from generation to generation, from *Doktorvater* to *Doktorsohn*."⁵³ This statement alludes not only to the gender bias in traditional German scholarship, but also to the process of male homosocial bonding as an inextricable element of the tradition of handing down knowledge from "father" to "son."⁵⁴ Especially Frakes's declaration that he is engaged in a "political project," as well as his claim that patriarchal scholarship not only ignores the sexual politics in the epics but actively attempts "to prevent, subvert, deny, or coopt such a reading of the texts,"⁵⁵ has evoked extreme reactions from critics, ranging from very positive to decidedly negative. While Herminia Joldersma has described Frakes's book as a "highly skilful and imaginative combination of the insights of traditional medieval scholarship with the projects of contemporary feminism and cultural criticism,"⁵⁶ Winder O'Connell regards the author's theoretical basis as "political baggage" which "lead[s] to an unjustified overemphasizing of some elements and a corresponding, also unjustified, underestimating of

⁵³Frakes, 35.

⁵⁴On the concept of male homosocial bonding, see Part Two of this thesis. Frakes himself does not use the term "homosocial." See also R. Howard Bloch and Stephen G. Nichols, "Introduction," in *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper*, ed. R. Howard Bloch and Stephen G. Nichols (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1996), 7, who point out that several authors in their anthology (i.e. Michael Camille, David Hult and Alain Boureau) focus on the "father/son relationship of Paulin and Gaston Paris in the formation of medieval studies in France under the third Republic."

⁵⁵Frakes, 5.

⁵⁶Herminia Joldersma, review of *Brides and Doom: Gender, Property, and Power in Medieval German Women's Epic*, by Jerold Frakes, *Seminar* 32 (1996): 164.

others."⁵⁷ O'Connell, however, never indicates the basis for his definition of "justified" and "unjustified" issues. In a similar way, Frakes's critique of traditional scholarship has evoked equally diverse reactions. What O'Connell calls "taking aim at much of 'traditional' scholarship,"⁵⁸ is seen by Joldersma as a "necessary subtext"⁵⁹ to a critique of the patriarchal conventions in the epics themselves.

Lynn Tatlock's *The Graph of Sex and the German Text: Gendered Culture in Early Modern Germany 1500-1700* (1994) falls out of the time frame of this thesis.⁶⁰ It should be noted, however, that this anthology, too, revolves around the issue of gender, an approach which is called "an experiment"⁶¹ in the preface. The volume's contributing authors do not regard gender as a fixed category and they invite a diversity of approaches. Not only different approaches are encouraged, but also "differences in the understanding of [the] central category, gender."⁶²

The critical approaches briefly discussed here differ from more traditional medieval scholarship in that they underline the relevance of medieval writings for the analysis of

⁵⁷Winder O'Connell, review of Jerold Frakes, *Brides and Doom: Gender, Property, and Power in Medieval German Women's Epic*, in *Bryn Mawr Medieval Review*, 3 March 1998, online, tmr-1@listserv.cc.wmich.edu, 17 March 1998.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Joldersma, 164.

⁶⁰Lynn Tatlock, *The Graph of Sex and the German Text: Gendered Culture in Early Modern Germany 1500-1700* (Amsterdam: Atlanta, GA, 1994).

⁶¹Ibid, 1.

⁶²Ibid., 2.

"modern" issues, such as violence against women and rape. Such an approach not only "breathes new life into old works," but it at the same time points to the historicity of the issues examined and defines their place in a wider historical context.

3. The Objectives of this Thesis

... it is all the more necessary to keep the windows open, unless we want to die of suffocation, that is, of lassitude and disinterest; perhaps I should add: unless we want to renounce all hope even of seeing the facts, much less of interpreting them.

Paul Zumthor⁶³

This thesis offers a new reading of selected Middle High German texts with a special emphasis on the issues of gender and power. The task is not unproblematic, since all of the chosen texts have, as far as we know, been written or compiled by male authors, which necessarily renders their representations of relationships between the genders one-dimensional. Nonetheless, generalized statements, such as that by Claudia Opitz that the literature of the Middle Ages presents the reader with "male fantasies" of women rather than with women's "own experiences and activities, their views, needs, and wishes,"⁶⁴ need some

⁶³Paul Zumthor, *Speaking of the Middle Ages*, trans. Sarah White (Lincoln & London: U of Nebraska Press, 1986), 6.

⁶⁴Claudia Opitz, "Life in the Middle Ages," in *A History of Women in the West*, vol. 2: *Silences of the Middle Ages*, ed. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1992), 267.

modification in light of newer research into female patronage in the Middle Ages. Recent feminist scholars quite rightly emphasize medieval women's influence on cultural production as patrons. As June Hall McCash points out, medieval women were able to speak "with varying degrees of intensity and sometimes quite eloquently through the works they supported, the projects they sponsored, and the causes they embraced."⁶⁵ Joan Ferrante, too, emphasizes the important role some medieval women of the higher classes, "women rulers, regents, and abbesses,"⁶⁶ played as correspondents, readers, writers and literary patrons. We should not forget, however, that women's active influence on cultural production sometimes only masked the difficulties they encountered because of their sex in everyday life, as the example of Marie de Champagne demonstrates,⁶⁷ or that women's "special interest in sponsoring works that enhanced the power or reputation of women"⁶⁸ could be rooted in their deeply felt powerlessness in "real" life. Furthermore, Danielle Régnier-Bohler warns us against taking too readily female voices as reflecting these women's unadulterate viewpoints:

What we are looking for as we read the theologians and the moralists, the romance writers and the mystics, is the female voice. That voice was trained by a cultural code. Even as assertive a writer as Christine de Pisan, who dared

⁶⁵ June Hall McCash, "The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women: An Overview," in *The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women*, ed. June Hall McCash (Athens and London: The U of Georgia Press, 1996), 1.

⁶⁶ Joan Ferrante, *To the Glory of their Sex: Women's Roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 4.

⁶⁷ See McCash, 18.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

to say in public "I, Christine," was a product of that code. What we hear may be nothing more than the lines spoken by literary "actresses" in a theater of language.⁶⁹

However, despite these reservations, it is possible, albeit difficult to prove, that the reader can sometimes get a glimpse of "women's enthusiasms, concerns, and aspirations"⁷⁰ through the works they promoted. All the more "sobering" it is then, as Madeline Caviness points out, that female patrons very rarely used art "to subvert existing patriarchal structures."⁷¹ One could, of course, ask with Caviness, why would they? The typical female patrons of the Middle Ages, i.e. the women who "had sufficient power and command of wealth [...] to determine the contents of the books they owned,"⁷² had naturally the least interest in undermining the system that granted their class the most powerful position possible for medieval women. From this it can be concluded that the privilege that went with their social standing seems to have overridden the disadvantages they encountered due to their sex.

Valuable as insights into female patronage are, they are of only minor importance for

⁶⁹Danielle Régner-Bohler, "Literary and Mystical Voices," in *A History of Women in the West*, 430.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 1.

⁷¹Caviness, 143. As Caviness points out on the same page, one of the few exceptions to this rule was Hildegard of Bingen.

⁷²*Ibid.*

this thesis, since none of the works I discuss here was sponsored by a woman.⁷³ Even though there is, of course, always the possibility of indirect female influence of the woman behind the male sponsor,⁷⁴ there are no historical documents attesting to this kind of indirect patronage. In the case of the works analyzed in this thesis, there is therefore little reason to reject Opitz's claim that the reader is indeed presented primarily with "male fantasies."

Yet Opitz's expression "male fantasies" is important in another respect, since it emphasizes the aspect of representation. What Heather M. Arden states for medieval French literature holds true for literary representation *per se*, namely that it "does not reflect [...] social reality for the most part."⁷⁵ As Arden demonstrates, literary images can be based on stereotypes or literary motifs, such as that of the easily consoled widow. The image of the easily consoled widow in the texts Arden analyzes reveals less about the "real" widow of the Middle Ages than about male fears underlying this image: she is "an archetypal embodiment

⁷³On possible patrons of the works discussed in this thesis, see Joachim Bumke, *Mäzene im Mittelalter: Die Gönner und Auftraggeber der höfischen Literatur in Deutschland 1150-1300* (München: C.H. Beck, 1979), 257 (*Nibelungenlied*), 71 (Thomasin von Zerclaere's *Der welsche Gast*), 257 (*Wolfdietrich B*), 181, 192, 244 (Ulrich von Liechtenstein's *Frauendienst*), 279 (Dietrich von der Glezze's *Der Gürtel*), 171 (*Kudrun*), 20-21, 172, 243 (Hartmann von Aue's *Iwein*). See also Hanns Fischer, *Studien zur deutschen Märendichtung*, 2nd ed. Johannes Janota (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1983), 184-85 (*Der Ritter von Staufenberg*), 148 (Der Stricker's *Die Königin vom Mohrenland*). Fischer refers to *Beringer* several times, yet does not mention a possible patron. Neither Bumke nor Fischer refer to *Der Große Seelentrost*, Marquard vom Stein's *Der Ritter vom Turn*, *Eckenlied* or *Alten Weibes List*. There are no possible patrons listed for these works in the *Verfasserlexikon* either.

⁷⁴On the question of indirect female influence in Middle High German literature, see Bumke, 231-247.

⁷⁵Heather M. Arden, "Grief, Widowhood, and Women's Sexuality in Medieval French Literature," in *Upon My Husband's Death: Widows in the Literature and Histories of Medieval Europe*, ed. Louise Mirrer (Ann Arbor: The U of Michigan Press, 1992), 306.

of deeply rooted male attitudes toward women and female sexuality."⁷⁶ As one can see from the example of the stereotypical widow, or other stereotypes, such as that of the dumb peasant, the lusty monk etc., literature does not have to reflect reality; on the contrary, it can be consciously used in order to produce counter-images to a reality that is perceived as unsatisfactory in one way or the other. Ferrante observes that *despite* the presence of culturally active women in the Middle Ages, "many medieval men continue to mouth traditional misogyny."⁷⁷ Yet in some cases one might wonder whether it is not rather *because* of women's accomplishments in real life that they are depicted negatively in literature, if in fact literature sometimes works as an instrument for putting women back in their traditional place, as an instrument of a medieval "backlash"? One only has to call to mind modern "women's magazines" and their normative ideals of perfect femininity, complete with recipes, cosmetics, clothing and behavioural guidelines, to realize how little connection there may be between literary representation and "reality." Nevertheless, ideal images such as those in magazines for women relate to reality through the control they exert over their audience. Modern "women's journals" adhere to the same pattern as all public imagery we are confronted with in a modern consumer society. It proposes to "teach us that we transform ourselves, our lives" by "showing us people who have apparently been transformed and are, as a result, enviable."⁷⁸ Such mechanisms work in medieval literature, too. Medieval literature does function as a means of social control by presenting the audience with idealized

⁷⁶Ibid., 306.

⁷⁷Ferrante, 7.

⁷⁸John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (New York: The Viking Press, 1972), 131.

images of masculinity and femininity and by depicting various forms of social punishment directed towards those who do not fit the pattern.

It is thus important to realize that looking at images of men and women in literary texts is not to look at depictions of "real" medieval people, and that literature is no reliable historical source for those aiming at reconstructing the "actual" lives of the "real" people in the Middle Ages. What E. Jane Burns et al. state for women alone can be extended to both men and women, namely that they should be read "in the text as a textual sign rather than a historical entity."⁷⁹ Thus, when looking at men and women in medieval literature, I ultimately plan to "look beneath [the] polite surface to examine medieval men's attitudes [...] and fears."⁸⁰

In order to avoid the trap of only repeating, and so perpetuating, a text's predominantly male position, I consciously attempt to read texts "against their grain," i.e. against their own predominantly masculine "ideology." Following Pam Morris, I believe that the term "ideology" does not necessarily refer to a "consciously held system of beliefs which people knowingly choose or reject," but in a more indirect way describes the way in which we perceive reality and reveals our assumptions on which the perceptions of reality are based:

This understanding of "ideology" rests on the assumption that as we enter the cultural life of our society--as we acquire language and interact with others--we absorb and assume its way of seeing. We are drawn imperceptibly into a

⁷⁹E. Jane Burns, Sarah Kay, Roberta L. Krueger, and Helen Solterer, "Feminism and the Discipline of Old French Studies: *Une bele Disjointure*," in *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper*, ed. Bloch and Nichols, 230.

⁸⁰Arden, 317.

complex network of values, assumptions which are always already there prior to us and so seem natural, just the way things are.⁸¹

Reading against the "ideology" of a text authored by and ideologically centred around men requires primarily that we become aware of and pinpoint this "ideology," while consciously resisting (the temptation of) being drawn into the text's inherent view of the world. This might, for example, entail that the reader has to shift focus from the main characters in the text to marginal, or marginalized, ones and has to re-view or re-tell the story from the perspective of these marginal, or marginalized, characters. As my discussion of the term "truwe" in the Middle Low German devotional book *Der Große Seelentrost* in Part Two of this thesis demonstrates, this re-direction of the reader's focus might result in a serious questioning of a text's implications and ethical values. Of course, "reading against the grain" can be a difficult act, since the text often "seduces" the reader into an identification with its perspective, for example through the seemingly simple strategy of the use of the first person. If the story is related in the third person, the text may admit the reader into the thoughts and feelings of selected characters, then usually expressed in the first person. As Judith Fetterley points out with respect to modern American literature, "in such [male] fictions the female reader is co-opted into participation in an experience from which she is explicitly excluded; she is asked to identify with a selfhood that defines itself in opposition to her; she is required to identify against herself."⁸² As my discussion of the rape of Brünhild in the *Nibelungenlied*

⁸¹Pam Morris, *Literature and Feminism* (Oxford UK & Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1993), 4-5.

⁸²Fetterley, xii.

in Part One of this thesis demonstrates, this strategy may have serious consequences for the reader's judgment on issues as serious as conjugal violence and even rape. For this reason, I try to read the texts with the eyes of what Fetterley calls a "resisting reader." My final goal is to question and, if necessary, to contest the point of view offered by the text to its audience and, in a second step, to "construct oppositional narrative positions within the text from which to challenge its dominant values and gender assumptions."⁸³

The three parts of this thesis revolve around the textual negotiation of masculinity and femininity and the power relationship between the genders. Part One, "Constructing Gender and Power," focuses on the discussion of gender boundaries in medieval German literature, based primarily on Joan Scott's above quoted definition of gender. In order to place the literary texts in the cultural context of their time (to which they, of course, also contributed) this part begins with a short, and necessarily cursory, overview of the Biblical discussion of masculinity and femininity and the power relations between the genders. This is followed by some historical examples of gender transgressions. As the subsequent critical reading of the selected Middle High German texts demonstrates, neither the concepts of masculinity or femininity nor the power relationship between the genders are stable, but are being re-negotiated constantly.

Part Two, "Male Bonding and the Role of Women," investigates male homosocial bonds and their influence on the power-relationship between the genders. This part draws mainly on Claude Lévi-Strauss's theory of women as gifts that are exchanged between men, on Gayle Rubin's concept of the male "traffic in women," and on Eve Sedgwick's definition

⁸³Morris, 29.

of "homosociality." As my analysis of fictional and didactic texts demonstrates, the physical and symbolic exchange of women and their favours is not solely related to medieval marriage practices, but also reflected in courtly rituals, such as *frouwen schouwen*, where women are offered and used for (usually male) visual pleasure.

Part Three, "Men Encountering 'Other' Women," concentrates on the interplay between "Otherness" and gender, illuminated by relationships between Christian knights and female figures defying norms of conventional femininity, such as Wild Women, non-Christian/Heathen women, "supernatural" women and old women. I define the female figures in this part as "other" on two levels: first, in Simone de Beauvoir's meaning of woman as the female Other in her relationship to the normative ideal of masculinity; and second, in the medieval text's understanding of "other" women in relationship to the ideal of medieval Christian femininity. The negotiation of gender and power assumes a new dimension in the light of the depicted male encounters with these "other" women, who often force the man into a role in which he has to struggle to uphold his privileged masculine position.

My selection of primary sources deserves a short explanation. Since this thesis is approach-oriented, the number and variety of texts suitable to illustrate my point is as great as the number and variety of gender-discussions in medieval German literature, namely very extensive. Consequently, I have decided on a strategy that is conceptual rather than encyclopaedic. What I offer are case studies that illustrate some of the *mechanisms* employed in the construction of gender and power relations, rather than attempting an exhaustive (and perhaps exhausting) list of examples. The advantage of such a selective strategy is that I avoid sacrificing depth of analysis to sheer numbers. As the reader of this thesis will find, the

complexity of the issue discussed makes it impossible for me to restrict my analysis to two or three pages for each text in order to attempt to cover the corpus of medieval German literature, or even only the texts belonging to a specific sub-group, as do, for example, Petra Kellermann-Haaf or Heribert Hoven. Kellermann-Haaf, in her effort to cover "nahezu alle Versromane von den Anfängen der höfischen Literatur in Deutschland bis 1400"⁸⁴ in her analysis of women who act politically in courtly romance, has to limit herself to a short introduction and description of the political women she encounters in the texts. The same holds true for Heribert Hoven, who covers some hundred *maeren* in his analysis of the treatment of the erotic in the German *maere*. Valuable though this type of encyclopaedic approach may be for the reader looking for an overview of some kind, it proves unsuitable if one is aiming at an in-depth discussion of a specific text or a specific literary figure.

My decision to attempt a representative analysis of the issues of gender and power in medieval German literature, rather than listing all identified examples, has left me with the difficult task of selecting a relatively small number of texts. Even though many texts might provide material for my analysis, there are, of course, "texts [...], which lend themselves better than others to [a certain] approach,"⁸⁵ as Stephan Maksymiuk puts it. In his own analysis of the figure of the court magician in medieval literature, Maksymiuk is confronted with a similar problem. Even though he discusses only five medieval German romances

⁸⁴Petra Kellermann-Haaf, *Frau und Politik im Mittelalter: Untersuchungen zur politischen Rolle der Frau in den höfischen Romanen des 12., 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts* (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1986), 7: "almost all verse-romances from the beginnings of courtly literature in Germany until the year 1400."

⁸⁵Stephan Maksymiuk, *The Court Magician in Medieval German Romance* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996), 7.

exhaustively and under separate titles in his book, he has found it important "to substantiate [his] findings in other written sources,"⁸⁶ in the hope of achieving a "broad perspective of medieval attitudes."⁸⁷ For this reason Maksymiuk ultimately leaves the boundaries of "German or even European literature"⁸⁸ and analyzes texts ranging from Caesar's *The Gallic War*, *Beowulf* and the *Grettis saga* to Johann von Würzburg's *Wilhelm von Österreich* and a selection of early Irish myths and sagas.

Even though I have restricted my focus to medieval German literature, I do transgress some boundaries in my attempt to find examples that illustrate my argument on as broad a basis as possible. Whenever applicable, I discuss samples of both didactic literature and fiction. This distinction is, of course, artificial, and should probably be replaced by Bernard Sowinski's more refined distinction between "unmittelbar belehrende Dichtungen" and "Dichtungen, die mittelbar belehren."⁸⁹ Since didactic ("unmittelbar belehrende") texts are written or compiled with the explicit purpose of education, one might hope to find a more open and direct, as well as self-aware, treatment of the examined issues in such works. This self-awareness is often expressed through what Sowinski calls "den zeigenden oder ermahnenden Sprachgestus [...], mit dem die poetisierten Wissensinhalte dargeboten werden

⁸⁶Ibid., 7-8.

⁸⁷Ibid., 8.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Bernhard Sowinski, *Lehrhafte Dichtung des Mittelalters*, Sammlung Metzler 103 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1971), 2. This distinction would correspond with the English distinction between the directly and the indirectly didactic purpose of literature.

oder zur Befolgung von Lehren angehalten wird."⁹⁰ Moreover, in their literary function as mediators between medieval life and literature, didactic works should make transparent the above discussed link between societal and literary gender discussions, both of which constitute a part of the cultural influence exerted on the medieval audience. Fictional ("mittelbar belehrende") literature, on the other hand, is often indirect in its dealings with and judgments on the issues it addresses. Fictional works may attempt to exert influence on their readers' perceptions of specific issues, for example,

indem sie allgemeingültige Lehrinformationen in die Gespräche der handelnden Personen oder die Schilderungen des Autors einfügen, die dargestellten Personen zu positiven oder negativen Beispielsfiguren stilisieren, um Lebens- und Verhaltensideale sichtbar zu machen oder didaktische-erzieherische Wirkung zu erzielen, durch satirische oder groteske Verzeichnungen vorgeblicher Wirklichkeiten auf ein Ideal und dessen Verkehrung verweisen oder durch die Gesamtkomposition der poetischen Wirkelemente eines Werkes zur dichterischen Weltdeutung und Belehrung beizutragen versuchen.⁹¹

Due to their specific "didactic" method, any critical reading of fictional texts has to

⁹⁰Ibid.: "the pointing or admonishing mode of speaking in which the poeticized material is offered or in which the reader is admonished to follow lessons."

⁹¹Sowinski, 2-3: "... by including universally applicable didactic information in the dialogues of the acting characters or in the author's descriptions, by stilizing the depicted characters to positive or negative *exempla* in order to illuminate ideals of life and behaviour or to achieve didactic effects, to point to an ideal and its inversion through the satirical or grotesque distortion of alleged realities, or by attempting to contribute to the literary interpretation and instruction of the world through the whole composition of a work's poetical elements."

concentrate on the uncovering of the text's underlying assumptions and intended or unintended "narrative lessons"--and on determining whether these "narrative lessons" are delivered in an explicit or conspicuous mode by the text, or whether they are received on a subconscious level by the reader.

Among the fictional texts, I have tried to concentrate on what Rasmussen in her discussion of mothers and daughters in medieval German literature calls "prominent works -- canonical texts, as it were,"⁹² such as the *Nibelungenlied*, *Kudrun*, *Wolfdietrich*, *Iwein* or Ulrich von Liechtenstein's *Frauendienst*. I cannot, of course, cover all canonical texts. The fact that I left out important prominent works does not mean that they would not be fruitful for my approach. Konrad's *Engelhard*, for example, is a major example for male homosocial bonding. Like the *exemplum* in *Der Große Seelentrost* that I examine, it is based on the well-known legend of "Amicus and Amelius." However, I have chosen the lesser known Middle Low German version because in my opinion it shows not only the workings of the concept of "triuwe" more clearly, but it also offers a specific didactic framework that indicates the way in which this *exemplum* was used in the religious literature of the time. Hartmann's *Der arme Heinrich* offers an interesting, and much discussed, example of the male gaze. However, I mention this work only in passing in the context of my discussion of Hartmann's *Iwein* because of the similarities between the acts of looking described in both texts. Furthermore, I have not excluded lesser known, often shorter texts, most of them *maeren*, if they enable me to add a new and different aspect to my discussion. Beyond this, I have consciously tried to

⁹²Ann Marie Rasmussen, *Mothers and Daughters in Medieval German Literature* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse UP, 1997), xi.

avoid the repetitiveness inherent in interpreting examples similar enough to fall neatly into an established category, such as a literary genre, yet not different enough in their treatment of my specific topic to warrant an individual discussion. One of the criteria for my choice was that every chosen text, while illustrating the issue at question, should provide its own little "twist" to the discussion and add a different colour to the spectrum of gender relations in medieval German literature. Yet, in contrast to Maksymiuk, who also uses a wide variety of texts, I have given the lesser known texts a place in their own right next to the well-known works instead of discussing these former texts all together under more general headings. The reason for this is that the lesser known texts I have selected, even though they may not be of the same importance to traditional scholarship as the canonical ones, turn out to be "prominent" in the context of my discussion of gender and power relations. My interest in offering a wide variety of literary gender discussions has also led me to include one text that, strictly speaking, falls out of the time frame of this thesis, namely Sebastian Brant's *Das Narrenschiff*. Yet I find this text so valuable to my discussion "that I stretched the title to include it," as Edward R. Haymes charmingly puts it with respect to a similar "straying afield" in his book on the dark figure in medieval literature.⁹³

Considering the relatively small number of texts used for my investigation of gender and power, I will only be able to show the tip of the iceberg. I do not want to list all the texts that could have provided us with even more insights, though, to quote Rasmussen once again,

⁹³Edward R. Haymes and Stephanie Cain van D'Elden, eds., *The Dark Figure in Medieval German and Germanic Literature* (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1986), iii.

"there is doubtless much more."⁹⁴ For this reason I can only adopt the words of the editors of the collection *Liebe in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters*: "jeder Leser wird mehr als ein ihm vertrautes Stück Liebe im Mittelalter vermissen."⁹⁵ In the same way, every reader of this thesis will most probably miss one or more texts considered important to the issue. Yet despite the fact that I can neither treat every piece of literature nor represent all the attitudes of the period I investigate, I wish to express the same hopes as the aforementioned editors of *Liebe im Mittelalter*, namely that

die Spannweite der [Beiträge] in methodologischer Hinsicht und mit Hinblick auf literarische Gattungen und den Standort der behandelten Autoren, Werke und Themenkreise [...] breit genug [ist], um einiges von der Vielseitigkeit des [...] Themas und von den --noch nicht erschöpften-- Möglichkeiten seiner wissenschaftlichen Erschließung aufzuzeigen.⁹⁶

To increase the accessibility of this thesis and to broaden the range of my possible audience, I provide translations of all texts originally composed in any language other than English. For the quoted Middle High and Low German texts I have chosen what I consider the "best" available translation and use it critically; for texts not previously translated, I

⁹⁴Rasmussen, xi.

⁹⁵Jeffrey Ashcroft, Dietrich Huschenbrett and William Henry Jackson, eds., *Liebe in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters: St. Andrews-Colloquium 1985* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1987), v.-vi: "Every reader will miss more than one peace of love familiar to him in the Middle Ages."

⁹⁶Ibid., vi: "... that the range of the contributions with respect to methodology and with respect to literary genre and the position of the treated authors is wide enough to show something about the variedness of the topic and the, yet unexhausted, possibilities of its academic analysis."

provide my own translation. I understand my translations primarily as working-translations, which means that their main intent is closeness to the original, which might sometimes work at the cost of literary and esthetic quality. Closeness to the original is also the main criterion for the choice of what I regard as the "best" available translations. The translations provided are my own unless otherwise stated.

PART ONE: CONSTRUCTING GENDER AND POWER

... anyone wondering where to begin to understand the Western current of antifeminism must recognize that it is possible to begin just about everywhere.

Howard Bloch¹

1. The Biblical Tradition

The Biblical account of the creation and fall of man and woman in Genesis is perhaps the oldest known Christian source concerning the relationship between the genders:²

And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul [...]. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the Lord

¹R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Love* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago Press, 1991), 13.

²There exists, of course, an older, pre-Biblical tradition of notions on woman and gender, which lies outside the scope of this thesis. In general terms, in ancient Greece there seems to have been a variety of attitudes toward women and the relationship between the genders, ranging from the "striking disrespect for the Athenian woman (education befits only the courtesan) through the freer and more highly esteemed status of the Dorian woman to the pronounced high estimate of women in Sparta." H. Vorländer, "Woman, Mother, Virgin, Widow," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, gen. ed., Colin Brown, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1978), 1055. For further information see also Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution 750 BC - AD 1250* (Montréal, London: Eden Press, 1985).

God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.³

As Ann Jones and Peter Stallybrass point out, "in Genesis, the whole world is considered as gendered ('male and female created he them')."⁴ The Genesis account provides an explanation not only of the concepts of masculinity and femininity, but also of the unequal distribution of power between the genders, as well as of the negative image of woman. "Created out of man and for man, to relieve his loneliness and to help him, woman is shown to be responsible also for man's troubles, not the least of which is his loss of immortality."⁵ In the Old Testament, woman is defined solely in her relationship to man, and she is subject to male authority. Although recognized as a person and as a man's partner,⁶ a woman is legally no more than male property. Ruth, arguably one of the most impressive female characters in the Old Testament, serves as a prime example of women's status as object of exchange. After the death of her first husband, Mahlon, Ruth remains with her mother-in-law Naomi, and the two women undertake a long journey to Palestine, "two lone women who had neither money beyond their barest needs nor protector."⁷ In order to provide for her mother-in-law and for herself, Ruth fulfils the lowliest tasks, such as following the reapers and gathering up

³Genesis 2:7 and 2:21-22.

⁴Ann R. Jones and Peter Stallybrass, "Fetishizing Gender: Constructing the Hermaphrodite in Renaissance Europe," in *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, ed. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (New York, London: Routledge, 1991), 80.

⁵Rosemary Agonito, *History of Ideas on Woman: A Source Book* (New York: Perigree Books, 1977), 18.

⁶Vorländer, 1055.

⁷Edith Deer, *All the Women of the Bible* (New York: Harper and Row, 1955), 84.

fragments of grain. It is on this occasion that Ruth meets Boaz, a landowner and a distant relative. Even though it is Naomi who suggests Boaz as Ruth's potential next husband, the ultimate decision is made by neither of the women. Boaz has to negotiate with the man who has the prior legal right to Ruth, i.e. her next of kin. As it turns out, despite her former independent and adventurous life, Ruth, like any other young bride, is, as Brown puts it drily, "finally bought along with the field that Boaz redeemed (Ruth 4:5, 10)."⁸

The image of woman reflected in Biblical stories such as that of Ruth makes it hardly surprising to find that medieval interpretations⁹ of the Old Testament and especially of Genesis 2:7-25 served as one of the basic pillars of the institutionalized misogyny of the European Middle Ages, and evoked numerous warnings about woman's evil nature. As Rüdiger Schnell points out, "hinter dieser misogynen Einstellung stand letztlich die Auffassung von der Frau als Verkörperung der Schwäche des Fleisches, als Inbegriff des Sexuellen."¹⁰

What seems to have been "forgotten" not only in the Middle Ages, but until very recently, is the existence of a second version of the Biblical creation story, the so called "priestly" version in Genesis 1:27. In this passage the creation of man and woman is

⁸C. Brown, "Woman, Mother, Virgin, Widow," 1057. On the relationship between Naomi and Ruth see also Boswell, 137-38.

⁹On the act of patriarchal (mis)interpretations of Biblical texts (especially by St. Paul) see Mieke Bal, "Sexuality, Sin and Sorrow: The Emergence of the Female Character (A Reading of Genesis 1-3)," *Poetics Today* 6 (1985): 21-42.

¹⁰Rüdiger Schnell, *Causa Amoris: Liebeskonzeption und Liebesdarstellung in der mittelalterlichen Literatur* (Bern und München: Francke Verlag, 1985), 478: "Behind this misogynous attitude is the idea of the woman as personification of the weakness of the flesh, as the embodiment of sexuality."

described as a simultaneous act: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them." According to Howard Bloch, this "fact of cultural amnesia" might have had "far-reaching implications for the history of sexuality in the West":

Who knows? If the spirit of this "lost" version of Creation had prevailed, the history of the relations between the genders, beginning for example with the Fall, might have been otherwise.¹¹

Instead, the negative picture of woman based on the accepted account in Genesis 2:7-25 not only prevailed, but remained surprisingly persistent from the days of the Old Testament until today:

So persistent is the discourse of misogyny in the Middle Ages that the uniformity of its terms furnishes an important link between this period and the present, rendering the topic even more compelling because, as we shall see, such terms still govern (consciously or not) the ways in which the question of woman is conceived--by women as well as by men.¹²

Christine de Pizan in her *Cité de Dames* made the same observation on the repetitiveness of medieval misogyny already in the fifteenth century:

... judging from the treatises of all philosophers and poets and from all the orators --it would take too long to mention their names--it seems that they all speak from one and the same mouth. They all concur in one conclusion: that

¹¹Bloch, 23.

¹²Ibid., 6.

the behavior of women is inclined to and full of every vice.¹³

Berthold von Regensburg, one of the most influential German preachers of the thirteenth century, might serve as an example to illustrate not only how well the sanctified version of the Genesis account could be used in order to justify the traditional notions on gender and power relations between the genders, but also to demonstrate how the above outlined Biblical attitudes were disseminated by the Christian Church. Franciscan "Volksprediger"¹⁴ such as Berthold fulfilled an important function because of their explicit goal to reach the great masses of the medieval faithful who were unable to read the written treatises. Berthold proved to be an especially gifted preacher: he often attracted such a large audience that he was forced to preach outside the cities in the open air, since neither church nor marketplace could provide room for all his listeners.¹⁵ In his sermon "Von der Ê," Berthold explicitly refers to the sanctioned account in Genesis 2 when he claims:

Dô unser herre des aller êrsten die ê satzte in dem paradïse mit Adâme unde mit Êven, dô satzte er, daz diu frouwe dem manne undertænic wære unde der

¹³Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the Ladies*, trans. Earl Jeffrey Richards (New York: Persea Books, 1982), 4.

¹⁴Bernd-Ulrich Hergemöller, *Krötenkuß und schwarzer Kater: Ketzerei, Götzendienst und Unzucht in der inquisitorischen Phantasie des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Warendorf: Fahlbusch Verlag, 1996), 276.

¹⁵See Rudolf Cruel, *Geschichte der deutschen Predigt im Mittelalter* (1879; reprint Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1966), 306. On the relationship between Berthold's sermons and his audience, see also Volker Mertens, "'Der implizierte Sünder': Prediger, Hörer und Leser in Predigten des 14. Jahrhunderts: Mit einer Textpublikation aus den Berliner Predigten," in *Zur deutschen Literatur und Sprache des 14. Jahrhunderts: Dubliner Colloquium 1981*, eds. Walter Haug, Timothy R. Jackson and Johannes Janota (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1983), 76-114.

man der frouwen hêrscher wære.¹⁶

Although Berthold acknowledges that woman's subordination does not mean that the man may reign over her without any restrictions or in a tyrannical way ("Dîn mezzter ist ouch dîn eigen mezzter: dâ mite soltû doch ir die kelen niht abe snîden ..."),¹⁷ he nevertheless insists on a clearly defined power-relationship between the genders.¹⁸

In order to maintain this God-given relationship between man and woman it was deemed essential to define the boundaries between masculinity and femininity, for

far from being an expression of natural differences, exclusive gender identity is the suppression of natural similarities. It requires repression: in men, of whatever is the local version of "feminine" traits; in women, of the local definition of "masculine" traits. The division of the sexes has the effect of repressing some of the personality characteristics of virtually everyone, men

¹⁶Berthold von Regensburg, "Von der Ê," in *Vollständige Ausgabe seiner Predigten mit Anmerkungen*, ed. Pfeiffer (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1965), 325. "When our Lord for the first time established the bond in paradise with Adam and Eve, he decided that woman be subject to man, and man be the woman's master." On the question of authenticity of authorship see Frank G. Banta, "Berthold von Regensburg," in *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*, vol. 1, ed. Kurt Ruh et al. (Berlin, New York: Walther de Gruyter, 1978), 817-823.

¹⁷Ibid., 326: "Your knife is also your own knife, but you nevertheless should not cut her throat with it..."

¹⁸In contrast, for example, to the preacher generally known as the "Schwarzwälder," who proclaims total equality between the genders. See Ernst Wolfgang Keil, *Deutsche Sitte und Sittlichkeit im 13. Jahrhundert nach den damaligen deutschen Predigten* (Dresden: Verlag C. Ludwig Ungelenk, 1931), 93-94.

and women.¹⁹

Visible gender markers proved useful to enforce differentiation, as may be seen in the following injunction in Deuteronomy 22:5, which forbids men and women the wearing of the attire of the opposite sex: "The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abominations unto the Lord thy God." Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:6-15 argues that a man wearing long hair sins against nature, while for a woman it is a shame to be shorn or shaven. Regarding the power-relationship between the genders, Paul continues the misogynous tradition outlined in the Old Testament when he states: "But I have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor. 11:3).

The attribution of gender markers and the regulation of the relationship of power between the genders were strongly connected, for only a clear-cut distinction between man and woman could maintain a distribution of power that was based on the inherent superiority of one, namely the male, gender. Consequently, the blurring of the distinction between the "superior" male and the "inferior" female half of humankind was regarded as dangerous. Berthold von Regensburg, in his above quoted sermon on conjugal relations, provides a vivid example of the typical medieval reaction to gender transgressions:

Man suln strîten unde frouwen suln spinnen. Als einist, dô was ein unsælige,
der nam sich spinnens ane: den verwarf unser herre von sînem künicrîche dar
umbe, daz er sich spinnens ane hete genomen. Wan man die suln strîten,

¹⁹Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 180.

frouwen die suln spinnen.²⁰

In order to suppress transgressions of prescribed gender boundaries, medieval didacticists not only threatened their audience with eternal punishment, but often also employed more secular "pedagogical" means. As Jenny Jochens points out, in Old Norse society, for example, "the law confirmed gender distinctions by making it illegal for men and women to wear the clothing of the opposite sex."²¹ The punishment for a violation of this law was smaller outlawry, which meant expatriation for three years. And where no actual law existed, gender transgressions were punished on a societal level. Some medieval didactic literature, like for example Sebastian Brant's *Das Narrenschiff*, makes use the element of satire in order to stigmatize and isolate violators of gender norms, and thus to help regulate the relationship between men and women. The strategy of satirical literature is to expose the transgressor of norms to public ridicule, and to use him or her as an *exemplum* for the education of society. Ridicule and stigmatization lead to the exclusion of unwanted "elements" from specific parts of medieval society, such as for example from the male homosocial bonds of knighthood. Since, as Northrop Frye points out, "both humour and attack depend on certain conventions which are assumed to be in existence before the satirist

²⁰Berthold von Regensburg, 325. "Men shall fight and women shall spin. Once there was an ill-fated man who undertook to spin: our Lord rejected him from his Kingdom because he had undertaken to spin. Because men shall fight and women shall spin."

²¹Jenny Jochens, "Before the Male Gaze: The Absence of the Female Body in Old Norse," in *Sex in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays*, ed. Joyce E. Salisbury, (New York, London: Garland Publ., 1991), 9. On the same page Jochens quotes the actual passus in Grágás in English translation: "If a woman dresses in male clothing (*karl klæðom*) or cuts her hair like a man or carries weapons in order to be different from others, the punishment is the smaller outlawry (expatriation for three years)... The same is the case if men dress in female." (Gg, 1b. 203-04)

begins to write,²² satirical literature offers interesting insights into the system of societal norms it purports to uphold. Moreover,

the tone of antagonism or attack in satire must imply an assertion and a defence of a moral principle. The satirist, when attacked, takes a very high moral line. He is a prophet sent to lash the vices and follies of the time, and he will not stop until he has cleansed the foul body of the infected world.²³

As will be demonstrated in later parts of this thesis, this characterization of the satirist is not only timeless, but it is shared by the medieval preacher, who takes a similar "high moral line," based on his acknowledged position as a disseminator of Christian norms.

Within the medieval system of thought, based on the notion of male superiority and female inferiority, both "mannish" women and "womanish" men offered potential for satire, even though in different ways. As Bernadette Brooten points out in connection with Paul's injunction in 1. Corinthians, "for the man the fear is that by looking like a woman he loses his masculinity and can sink to the level of a woman. [...] A woman cannot sink to the level of a man. She can only make ridiculous, yet nevertheless threatening, attempts to rise to that level."²⁴ While an "effeminate" man may seem ridiculous, and often at the same time suspect, because he deliberately gives up his male privileges and thereby reduces his status in

²²Northrop Frye, "The Nature of Satire," in *Satire: Theory and Practice*, ed. Charles A. Allen and George D. Stephens (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publ., 1962), 18.

²³Ibid., 19.

²⁴Bernadette J. Brooten, "Paul's View on the Nature of Women and Female Homoeroticism," in *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality*, ed. C.W. Atkinson et al. (Boston, Massachusetts: Bacon Press, 1985), 76-77.

medieval society, a "masculine" woman can provoke scorn because of the inherent futility of her (supposed) attempt to become a man. The only exceptions to this rule were female saints, such as for example St Pelagia,²⁵ who often received the epithet "femina virilis"²⁶ in a positive sense, as well as some successful historical female cross-dressers. The exceptional status of female saints finds its explanation in their special place within, and at the same time outside of, medieval society, which in return is based on their acknowledged extraordinary personal qualities. According to Natalie Davis, female saints were perceived as "going beyond what can ordinarily be expected of a mere female [...] as women ruling the lower in themselves and thus deserving to be like men."²⁷ Also Elizabeth Castelli confirms that by "becoming male" "women [could] gain access to holiness and salvation" -- an idea based on the apocryphal *Gospel of Thomas*: "For every woman who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven."²⁸ In the same way, Hotchkiss's above mentioned essay on the life of

²⁵For an account of her life see James the Deacon, "The Life of St. Pelagia the Harlot," trans. Eustochius, in *The Desert Fathers*, ed. Helen Wadell (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 1957), 173-188. On the topic of female transvestite saints (including St Pelagia), see also Vern. L. Bullough, "Transvestites in the Middle Ages," *American Journal of Sociology* 79 (1973-4): 1381-1394.

²⁶Rüdiger Schnell, "Der Frauenexkurs in Gottfried's Tristan (V. 17858-18114): Ein kritischer Kommentar," *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 103 (1984): 20: "Es wird deutlich geworden sein, daß der Topos von der "männlichen Frau" fast ausschließlich in hagiographischen und pastoraltheologischen Texten verwendet wurde.... Es handelt sich eindeutig um ein Ideal des klösterlichen, zumindest des kirchlichen Lebens." [It will have become obvious that the topos of the "masculine woman" was used almost entirely in hagiographic and pastoraltheological texts.... One is definitely dealing with an ideal of monastic, or at least ecclesiastical, life.]

²⁷Natalie Davis, "Women on Top," in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, ed. Natalie Davis (Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 1975), 132.

²⁸Elizabeth Castelli, "'I Will Make Mary Male': Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Women in Late Antiquity" in *Body Guards: The Cultural*

Hildegund von Schönau emphasizes the privileged position of a woman who renounces her "inferior" femininity in order to fulfil her role in God's plan.

With respect to the masculine gender role, only the later Middle Ages showed some kind of weakening of rigid gender distinctions. Especially among Cistercian monks there developed what might be regarded as an idealization of the mothering role, symbolized by the visualization of Jesus as mother. Cistercian abbots in their role as spiritual leaders sometimes called themselves mothers of the convent, thereby combining "male" authority with "feminine" attributes such as softness and love. Furthermore female, and especially maternal, imagery was used in connection with male spiritual leadership. The female breasts and the act of nursing, for example, were often regarded as a symbol of preaching, with the mother's milk as a sign of affection and instruction.²⁹ An example is given by Bernard of Clairvaux, who wrote on the responsibility of prelates: "Show affection as a mother would, correct like fathers. [...] Be gentle, avoid harshness, do not resort to blows, expose your breasts: let your bosoms expand with milk not swell with passion."³⁰ This positive imagery does not indicate, however, that gender stereotypes were challenged, rather on the contrary:

The second general characteristic of maternal imagery in twelfth-century Cistercian writing is the consistency of the sexual stereotypes that lie behind it. In other words, certain personality characteristics are seen by these authors

Politics of Gender Ambiguity, ed. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), 30.

²⁹Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: U of California Press, 1982), 110-169.

³⁰Quoted in Bynum, 118.

as female and certain others as male. [...] Moreover, these stereotypes remain the same whether they are evaluated as positive or negative.³¹

The consistency of gender stereotypes seems to indicate that, as Vern Bullough claims, the monks "grafted feminine qualities onto the male" rather than "redefin[ed] masculinity."³²

Furthermore, Bynum finds little evidence "that the popularity of feminine and maternal imagery in the high Middle Ages reflects an increased respect for actual women by men."³³

Despite this restricted movement in the Cistercian monasteries, the traditional unequal power relationship between the genders remained widely untouched. This finds its most likely explanation in the fact that

the males who popularized maternal and feminine imagery were those who had renounced the family and the company of women; the "society" out of which their language comes is a substitute for (and implicitly a critique of) the world. [...] To call monks women, as Bernard does, is to use the feminine as something positive (humility) but also to imply that such is *not* the opinion of society.³⁴

It is certainly no coincidence that the here discussed accepted, or at least tolerated, forms of violations of gender boundaries, symbolized by the figure of the female

³¹Ibid., 148.

³²Vern L. and Bonnie Bullough, *Crossdressing, Sex, and Gender* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 66.

³³Bynum, 143.

³⁴Ibid., 144. Her emphasis.

"transvestite" saint and the feminized role of the Cistercian monk, belonged in the ecclesiastical context. This means that they remained in a "sealed" vacuum, where they could represent little danger to the secular gender norms of their time. Thus it seems that the medieval Christian Church not only served as the main promoter of dichotomous gender categories, but that it at the same time was the only institution to provide legal space for any, if ever so limited, blurring of these same categories.

2. Gender-Transgressions: Some Historical Examples³⁵

Despite the outlined prohibitions against violations of prescribed gender roles in the secular world, gender transgressions not only occurred in the Middle Ages but sometimes even became fashionable:

We may safely assume that despite the lamentations of the critics, there were always some people who enjoyed blurring the sexual distinctions inherent in anatomy, and questioning through clothing or coiffure the meaning--perhaps

³⁵The expression "historical" here refers to medieval documents that were regarded as non-fictional at the time of their composition and distribution, such as chronicles, histories, legal documents, as well as to examples out of everyday life included in medieval sermons. I do not make any statement as to the historical value of these medieval "documents" from the modern perspective.

even the validity--of gender distinctions.³⁶

Although accounts of transvestite practice in the Middle Ages are sparse,³⁷ some information about the attitude toward real-life gender transgressions may be gathered from hints in historical, legal, didactical and biographical documents. In his *Ecclesiastical History* (about 1130-40) the chronicler Ordericus Vitalis, for instance, offers an impressive description of a certain fashionable movement at the court of King Rufus (about 1133), and especially emphasizes the role of the "effeminatus" as one of its main promoters:

At that time effeminates set the fashion in many parts of the world: foul catamites, doomed to eternal fire, unrestrainedly pursued their revels and shamelessly gave themselves up to the filth of sodomy. [...] They parted their hair from the crown of the head to the forehead, grew long and luxurious locks like women, and loved to deck themselves in long, overtight shirts and tunics. [...] Our wanton youth is sunk in effeminacy, and courtiers, fawning, seek the favours of women with every kind of lewdness.³⁸

The preacher St Bernardino of Siena (1380-1444), who, not unlike Berthold von Regensburg, "regularly drew huge crowds and who, with the encouragement of the government, thundered

³⁶Susan C. Shapiro, "Sex, Gender, and Fashion in Medieval and Early Modern Britain," *Journal of Popular Culture* 20 (1987): 113.

³⁷David Lorenzo Boyd and Ruth Mazo Karras, "The Interrogation of a Male Transvestite Prostitute in Fourteenth-Century London," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian & Gay Studies* 1 (1995): 484.

³⁸*The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, vol. 4, books 7/8, ed. and trans. Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), 189.

against the practice of homosexuality,³⁹ associates effeminacy not only with the practice of sodomy but also with that of youthful prostitution--a state for which he blames especially the young men's parents:

I have heard of some boys who paint their cheeks and go about boasting about their sodomy and practice it for gain. It is largely their mothers' and fathers' fault for not punishing them, but especially the mothers, who empty their purses without asking where the money came from. And it is a grave sin to make a doublet that reaches only to the navel and hose with one small patch in front and one behind, so that they show enough flesh to the sodomites. You spare the cloth and expend the flesh!⁴⁰

Thomas Walsingham (c. 1345-1422) complains in similar fashion about the court of Richard II, yet emphasizes less the knights' outer appearance and their sexual "deviance" than their social and intellectual refinement, which in his opinion replaces the male virility that is essential on the battle-field:

These were more knights of Venus than of Bellona, more valiant in the bedchamber than on the field, armed with words rather than weapons, prompt in speaking, but slow in performing acts of war. These fellows, who are in close association with the King, care nothing for what a knight ought to

³⁹Jeffrey Richards, *Sex, Dissidence and Damnation: Minority Groups in the Middle Ages* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 146.

⁴⁰St Bernardino of Siena, quoted by Richards, 146.

know.⁴¹

The only historical description of what today would be regarded as male transvestism in medieval England has survived in the "Corporation of London Records Office, Plea and Memoranda Roll A34, m.2," a legal document of 1395.⁴² Here it is related that

On 11 December, 18 Richard II, were brought in the presence of John Fressh, Mayor, and the Aldermen of the City of London John Britby of the county of York and John Rykener, calling [himself] Eleanor, having been detected in women's clothing, who were found last Sunday night between the hours of 8 and 9 by certain officials of the city lying by a certain stall in Soper's Lane committing that detestable, unmentionable, and ignominious vice.⁴³

Also in this account the male violation of gender roles is associated not only with sexual deviance but with the "social" crime of prostitution.

Iwan Bloch in his article "Die Homosexualität in Köln am Ende des 15. Jahrhunderts"⁴⁴ describes the results of a questionnaire that was put to priests and confessors in 1484 concerning the occurrence of homosexuality in their diocese. Although the specific accounts are brief and do not relate details, it may be assumed that at least some of the

⁴¹*Historia Anglicana*, quoted in Ad Putter, "Arthurian Literature and the Rhetoric of 'Effeminacy,' in *Arthurian Romance and Gender*, 37.

⁴²Boyd and Karras, 481-483.

⁴³Ibid., 482. The Latin original of this document is on page 481 of Boyd and Karras's article.

⁴⁴Iwan Bloch, "Die Homosexualität in Köln am Ende des 15. Jahrhunderts," in *Studies in Homosexuality: History of Homosexuality in Europe and America*, ed. Dynes Donaldson (New York: Garland, 1992), 528-535.

mentioned homosexual encounters included cross-dressing; and it may be asked to what degree many (or all?) of these acts in one way or another have to be regarded as violations of gender norms.⁴⁵ Warren Johansson's "London's Medieval Sodomites"⁴⁶ provides a similar indirect source of historical gender transgressions. Johansson analyzes Richard of Devizes's *Chronicle of the Times of King Richard the First*, which includes a portrayal of the London underworld of ca. 1192. In this chronicle the reader is offered a list of eighteen types of citizens of London, seven of which Johansson has marked as "erotic subjects." Among these "erotic subjects" we find the *glabriones*, meaning "smooth-cheeked, pretty, effeminate boy[s]," the *pusiones*, best translated with "little hustlers," and finally the *molles*, i.e. "effeminates."⁴⁷

As becomes obvious from the above accounts, "effeminate" behaviour is usually

⁴⁵This question would deserve a detailed study of the perception and treatment of homosexuality in the Middle Ages. The focus of this chapter, however, lies on transgressions of gender boundaries which may, but do not necessarily have to, include homosexuality. That does not mean that violations of gender norms cannot be expressed in terms of homosexual behaviour, as may be seen from examples in Old Norse sagas. As Preben Meulengracht Sørensen in *The Unmanly Man: Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society*, trans. Joan Turville-Petre (Odense: UP, 1983) demonstrates, "effeminacy" in Old Norse saga literature is often symbolized by the accusation of performing the role of the passive partner in a homosexual encounter. The active/passive distribution between the partners in a male homosexual encounter can, of course, at the same time be used to signify power-relationships between men, not unlike the one between men and women. As Margaret Clunies Ross formulates it: "There is an assumption in most human societies [...] that the relationship of inferior and superior may be expressed in sexual terms, and, in particular, that the enforced presentation of the backside by one man to another expresses, in terms of an active-passive homosexual idiom, their relationship as dominant to inferior in other spheres." Margaret Clunies Ross, "Hildir's Ring: A Problem in the Ragnarsdrápa, Strophes 8-12," *Medieval Scandinavia* 6 (1973): 87.

⁴⁶Warren Johansson, "London's Medieval Sodomites," in *Studies in Homosexuality*, 159-162.

⁴⁷Ibid., 159-160

associated with homosexual or heterosexual lewdness and very often with prostitution, too. Sometimes some these charges are even combined: John Rykener, for example, admitted during his court hearing that he had had intercourse not only with men "as a woman" but also "as a man with many nuns, and [...] with many women both married and otherwise, how many he did not know."⁴⁸ The connection between the male transgression of gender boundaries and the violation of Christian sexual norms is probably the reason why the mere idea of a man's social or intellectual refinement, as it is described for example in Thomas Walsingham's report, was easily tainted by the underlying notions of moral and sexual "degeneracy."

Yet sexuality could also play a role in female transgressions of gender boundaries, even if less often than in the case of their male counterparts. Women who, for example, crossdressed as men in order to improve their social status or just to be able to live more exciting lives could be "heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, or perhaps even asexual."⁴⁹ The Spanish woman Eleno?/Elena de Cespedes (1545?-88), who was married at sixteen and abandoned by her husband when she became pregnant, not only started to dress like a man and work as a surgeon, but also had several love affairs with women, one of whom she eventually even married. Yet Elena's life took an unhappy turn when she was arrested for impersonating a man and mocking the sacrament of marriage. She had to appear before the Inquisition and was sentenced to two hundred lashes of the whip as well as ten years of

⁴⁸Boyd and Karras, 483.

⁴⁹Bullough and Bullough, *Crossdressing*, 110.

service in a public hospital.⁵⁰ Other women in male disguise are known mainly for their "manly" prowess in fights, with sexuality not playing a dominant role in the accounts of their life-stories. Catalina de Erauso (b. 1592), for example, cut her hair and donned male clothes in order to flee the convent in which she had been placed at an early age. "After a series of adventures, she changed her name to Alonso Diaz Ramírez de Guzman and joined a galleon crew bound for Latin America. Landing in Panama, she set out to make her fortune."⁵¹ Her life-story⁵² includes the killing of several men in battle or in gambling fights, and although she later had to confess to her femininity, she was granted special permission to continue to wear men's clothing by Pope Urban VIII.

Rudolf Dekker and Lotte C. van de Pol, in their study on female transvestism in early modern Europe, describe 119 cases of female crossdressing between 1550 and 1839, and come to the conclusion that "in former times it was not at all exceptional for women to take on the appearance of men as a solution to their personal problems."⁵³ Of course, that does not mean that female gender transgressions were judged more positively than their male counterparts:

In spite of the popularity of the theme [in fiction], reactions to real-life

⁵⁰Ibid., 94-96. Documents of the trial have survived and are now to be found in the Archivo Historico Nacional (Madrid, Sección de Inquisición, *lejago* 234, *expediente* 24), Bullough and Bullough, 111.

⁵¹Ibid., 96.

⁵²Catalina wrote her own life story, which appeared in Madrid in 1625; see Bullough and Bullough, 111.

⁵³Rudolf M. Dekker and Lotte C. van de Pol, *The Tradition of Female Transvestism in Early Modern Europe* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 99.

transvestism were fundamentally negative. It was forbidden in the Bible, and it also confused the social order and threatened the hierarchy of the sexes; ambiguity on the matter of gender presumably made people ill at ease.

However, a few women who had successful careers as sailors and soldiers and who had resumed respectable lives as women met with praise and reward.⁵⁴

A comparison of the above discussed samples of male and female gender transgressions seems to suggest that the connection between the violation of gender norms and sexual or moral "depravity" proved less strong in the case of women than in men. A possible explanation for this discrepancy may be, that, as Vern Bullough suggests, the only way society could justify the loss of male status through crossdressing was "through attaching erotic connotations to such conduct which made it both dangerous and sinful."⁵⁵ That crossdressing could, on the other hand, offer several advantages, sexual and otherwise, to women is amply documented in the cited life-stories. If one considers that the assumption of a male identity could grant a woman more freedom than was usually assigned to her by medieval society, it seems only consistent that the female transgression of gender boundaries should have been regarded much more as a social, rather than a sexual, "crime." Still I would not go as far as Bullough and Bullough and suggest that medieval society tolerated or even

⁵⁴Ibid., 100-101.

⁵⁵Vern L. Bullough, "Transvestites," 1381. This definition exempts male crossdressing done for the strategic purpose of gaining forbidden access to women. But even in such a case there might exist an underlying subtext which suggests more and varying reasons for the choice of such a strategy.

actively encouraged female attempts to become more masculine⁵⁶ (except in the case of female saints), even if it may have shown a theoretical understanding for a woman's wish to strive to the position of the "better" half of humanity. The outcome of Elena's crossdressing serves as a striking example of the severe punishment society meted out to those who transgressed the boundaries between the genders. As the following discussion of literary examples shows, medieval authors, too, were sensitive to both male and female transgressions of gender boundaries, and often did not hesitate to curb these kinds of violations.

⁵⁶Bullough and Bullough, *Crossdressing*, 90.

3. Gender and Power in Medieval German Literature

3.1. Didactic Literature

a) Sebastian Brant: *Das Narrenschiff*

*Makeup makes the
woman, and unmakes the man*

Amy Richlin⁵⁷

As the above cited Biblical injunctions indicate, hair and clothing were regarded as important gender markers. Ordericus Vitalis describes the "long and luxurious locks" that render a man "womanish," and the historical examples of female cross-dressers often mention the cutting of a woman's hair as a symbol of her "transformation" into a man. When Sebastian Brant in the fourth chapter of his *Das Narrenschiff*,⁵⁸ a moral-didactic satire of the 15th century,

⁵⁷Amy Richlin, "Making Up a Woman: The Face of Roman Gender," in *Off with Her Head!: The Denial of Women's Identity in Myth, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz and Wendy Doniger (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: U of California Press, 1995), 204.

⁵⁸Sebastian Brant, *Das Narrenschiff*, ed. Manfred Lemmer (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1986). My quotations from Brant's *Narrenschiff* are taken from this edition. An extensive bibliography

laments the feminization of young men under the influence of new fashions, he not only refers to the extravagant treatment of the hair of the head, but also to the absence of a beard:

Das ettwan was eyn schantlich dyng
 Das wygt man yetz schlecht und gering
 Eyn ere was ettwan tragen bert
 Jetzt hand die wibschen man gelert
 Und schmyeren sich mit affen schmaltz
 Und du[o]nt entblo[e]ssen iren halß
 Vil ring und grosse ketten dran.

[. . .]

Mit Schwebel / hartz / büffen das har
 Dar in schlecht man dan eyer klar
 Das es im schusselkorb werden kruß
 Der henckt den kopff zu[o]m fenster uß
 Der bleicht es an der sunn und für ...

Das Narrenschiff, v. 1-7, 9-13)

*[What in the old days was a disgraceful thing / Is nowadays regarded as
 harmless and of little importance / Once it was an honour to grow a beard /*

up to the year 1983 is offered by Klaus Manger, *Das "Narrenschiff,"* *Erträge der Forschung* 186 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1983), 137-176.

*Now the effeminate men have learned⁵⁹ / And smear themselves with monkey's
grease / And leave the neck entirely bare / With many rings and heavy chains
/[...] / They curl their hair with sulphur and resin / Wherein are beaten
eggwhites / so that it becomes curly in the [haircage?]⁶⁰ / One sticks his head
out of the window / The other bleaches it in sun and fire...]*

Both Ordericus Vitalis and Sebastian Brant regard the described men's long and curly hair as a "feminine" attribute, and Brant mentions the absence of facial hair, which would serve as an unambiguous male gender marker. Furthermore, Brant's detailed description of the beautifying procedures indicates that the interest in corporeal beauty and fashion in itself was regarded as a "feminine" character trait, which becomes grotesque when connected with the "wrong," i.e. the male, gender. Although women's "natural propensity for ornamentation"⁶¹ was criticized throughout the Middle Ages, it was nevertheless regarded as a typical feminine "weakness" which did not cause any gender trouble: "woman naturally decorates herself and is by nature decoration."⁶² Johannes Pauli in his satire *Schimpf und Ernst* (1522) offers an amusing example of medieval criticism of feminine corporeal vanity, where he describes "ein frau die het einer doten frawen ir har ab geschnitten, wan si het gar

⁵⁹This line may be translated alternatively as "now men have learned the behaviour of women."

⁶⁰The MHG word "schusselkorb" has not been adequately explained. See Friedrich Zarncke's speculations in Sebastian Brant, *Das Narrenschiff*, ed. Friedrich Zarncke (Leipzig 1854; reprint, Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1961), 308.

⁶¹Carla Casagrande, "The Protected Woman," in *A History of Women in the West*, 93.

⁶²Bloch, 41. On the roots of the estheticization of gender in early Christianity, see especially Bloch, 37-63.

ein hübsch har, vnd flächt es in ir har vnd liesz da vornen herfür gon das man meint sie het so hübsch har, vnd treib also hoffart mit."⁶³ Ornamentation in men, in contrast, seemed "perverse." Moreover, the made-up face is a face meant to be looked at, and thus by its very nature is the potential object of the (male) gaze. As Howard Eilberg-Schwartz states,

Cosmetics and hairstyling, instead of hiding the female head, draw the gaze to it and highlight its features. These practices are enmeshed in the same eroticism as the practice of veiling. But instead of resisting desire, they play on and provoke it. To be made up is to invite looking, to draw attention to the face and head, to signify the desire to be seen and admired. And it is rather the desire to be looked at than the desire to look which is signalled by cosmetics.⁶⁴

The desire to be looked at is culturally linked to femininity, whereas the active gaze is defined as male.⁶⁵ Thus by making up his face the fashionable young knight puts himself in the feminine position of the object not only of the male gaze but also of potentially male desire. For this reason it can be safely assumed that Brant, although avoiding any explicit references to male homosexuality, nevertheless manages to evoke in his readers' mind the association between effeminization and homoeroticism which is so vehemently discussed in the religious and historical literature of his time.

⁶³Johannes Pauli, *Schimpf und Ernst*, ed. Hermann Österley (Stuttgart: Literarischer Verein, 1866; reprint, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1967), 253: "a woman who had cut off a dead woman's hair, because she had beautiful hair, and braided it into her own hair, and let it hang out so that one thought she had that beautiful hair, and this way she demonstrated her vanity."

⁶⁴Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, "Introduction: The Spectacle of the Female Head," in *Off with Her Head!*, 2.

⁶⁵On the male gaze and the (gender) politics of looking, see Part Two of this thesis.

The message of Brant's text is reinforced by the accompanying woodcarving. It depicts a young knight, dressed in the latest fashions, facing a fool. The fool, identifiable by his fool's cap, the typical symbol of his profession, forces the knight to contemplate his appearance in a mirror, the symbol of vanity. The top of the woodcarving is dominated by a banner, which introduces the knight as "Uly von Stouffen, frisch und ungeschaffen" [Uly von Stouffen, young and ugly]. The term "ugly" might refer to moral as well as physical characteristics, thus giving expression not only to the knight's outer appearance but also to his supposed "perverted" mind. Woodcarving and banner emphasize Brant's uneasiness about the presence of female gender markers in males already observed in the text itself.

The contrast between the young man's self-perception as beautiful (represented by the flaunting of his appearance) and Brant's view of him as ugly indicates two different standards of judgment. For his judgment of himself the fashionable young man relies on the same mainly aesthetic criteria as are used for the evaluation of feminine beauty,⁶⁶ while Brant draws on moral-theological notions. The feminizing effect of the young man's hair proves strong enough even to override the gender signals provided by his clothing. The clothing, as much as it may support the impression of moral depravity, undermines the supposed female appearance by emphasizing the wearer's male anatomy--much to the annoyance of the author and other moral critics of the time:

Kurtz schaf[e]ntlich vnd beschrotten ro[e]ck

Das einer kum den nabel bdo[e]ck

⁶⁶On the topic of medieval feminine beauty, see especially Rüdiger Krüger, *puella bella: Die Beschreibung der schönen Frau in der Minnelyrik des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: helfant edition, 1993), 112-152.

Phsuch schand der tütschen nacion

Das die natur verdeckt wil han

Das man das blo[e]st / und sehen lat

Das Narrenschiff, v. 25-29

[*Coats, short and disgustingly cut / Which hardly cover the navel / Fy, shame upon the German nation / What nature wants to be covered / One exposes and exhibits.*]

Brant alludes not only to the new, fashionable shortness of the male *jaque*, or *jaquette*, which no longer even reached the hips, but also to the codpiece (flap or pouch) that was tied to the hose and covered their front opening.⁶⁷ A colourful description of the codpiece (and the reaction it provoked) is provided by Friedrich Zarncke in his comment on the *Narrenschiff*:

... sodann wird geklagt über die allerdings unglaublich unschickliche mode des latzes, den man fast schlimmer als eine wirkliche entblössung der genitalien nennen muss, da er sie, indem er sie in ein eigenes, buntverziertes, übermässig grosses behältnis schloss, auf das unanständigste hervordrängte.⁶⁸

Although the clothing of Brant's fashionable young man works as a male gender marker, and

⁶⁷Penelope Byrde, *The Male Image: Men's Fashion in Britain 1300-1970* (London: B.T. Batsford LTD, 1979), 61. Braun and Schneider, *Historic Costume in Pictures: Over 1450 Costumes on 125 Plates* (New York: Dover Publications, 1975) offer intriguing depictions of men's fashion in the Middle Ages. See especially plates 22-28 on the discussed short male hose, which by the fifteenth century were to be found throughout Europe.

⁶⁸Zarncke, 309: "Then the indeed unbelievably inappropriate fashion of the codpiece is lamented, a fashion which has to be seen as almost worse than an actual exposure of the genitals, since it emphasizes them in the most indecent manner by locking them into their own, highly ornate, overtly large receptacle."

especially the new fashionable hose emphasize the cues of anatomical sex in such a way that it was deemed "indecent" by many moral critics,⁶⁹ the described "feminine" traits nevertheless point to a cross-gender identity threatening enough to provoke Brant's harsh criticism.

Moreover, the above quoted sermon of Bernardino of Siena suggests that the short hose were suspected of provoking homosexual desire in other men--a fear which Brant again does not express directly, but which is likely implied in the sentence "das man das blo[e]st / und sehen lat." Johannes Pauli in a similar critique of the short hose complains: "Du sichst ouch da die erlossen kurtzen Röck die nit allein den hindern nit decken, ia die lenden und den Nabel nit."⁷⁰ Pauli also emphasizes the young men's exposed buttocks, which critics like Bernardino regard as such a strong invitation to the "sodomites."

In this context even the phallic codpiece might eventually be seen as diminishing the young man's masculinity rather than emphasizing it. It is possible that the codpiece in Brant's *Narrenschiff* plays the same ambiguous role as it does in Renaissance theatrical representations, where it works as "a sign of gender undecidability, since it is the quintessential gender mark of 'seeming.'"⁷¹ As Marjorie Garber points out, "the codpiece, like

⁶⁹See Byrde, 57: "The new length and fit [of the tunic] were taken much further than any previous fashion and caused a sensation. The idea of deliberately exhibiting the silhouette was eagerly seized upon, although Churchmen and moralists thoroughly disapproved of the way in which the contours of the body were so blatantly revealed. Contemporary writers went so far as to attribute the French defeat at the Battle of Crecy in 1346 to a Divine punishment for their pride in wearing such short, indecent clothes."

⁷⁰Quoted by Brant, *Das Narrenschiff*, ed. Zarncke, 309: "You can see the disgracefully short skirts, which not only fail to cover the buttocks, but neither loins and navel."

⁷¹Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 122.

Freud's undecidable underpants, is a sign of what might--or might not--be 'under there.'⁷²

When women in Renaissance drama crossdress as men (as, for example, Julia in Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*) the codpiece constitutes the essential male prop--attached to a woman's pants. Consequently, when looking at Brant's fashionable young knight, one might ask (and maybe the medieval audience asked) the same questions as Garber utters in relation to Shakespeare's plays: "Surely there are 'real men' in the plays, with real contents in their codpieces? It's not so clear."⁷³

In order to discourage other young people from following the example of men such as "Uly von Stouffen," Sebastian Brant chooses the method of ridiculing the transgressor of gender norms. This is achieved not only by his derogatory way of describing specific methods of body-care and hair-care ("affen schmaltz" for make-up, hanging one's head out of the window in order to bleach the hair, etc.), but more generally by depicting "reprehensible" forms of human behaviour as typical, and thus by dehumanizing the individual and reducing him or her to a mere comical stock type. According to Henri Bergson's theory of laughter, "it is comic to fall into a ready made category. And what is most comic of all is to become a category oneself into which others will fall, as into a ready-made frame; it is to cristallize into a stock character."⁷⁴ The fashionable Uli (and with him his potential followers among Brant's readers) is ridiculed not only because of his apparent loss of masculinity, but also because he

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid., 123.

⁷⁴Henri Bergson, *An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. Cloudesley Brereton (New York: MacMillan, 1911), 149.

forms a new type of stock character. As in other genres, such as the French *fabliaux* and the Middle High German *maere*, ridicule functions not only as a means of punishment for the actual transgressor of (gender-) norms, but also as a deterrent for any potential imitator.

Yet at the same time Brant's treatment of the fashionable young man demonstrates that the boundaries between masculinity and femininity were perceived as more fluid than he was prepared to admit, and that the position of male superiority had to be guarded. The comparison between the "good old days" and the sad state of the time described, which so skilfully sets the act of violation against what is promoted as a timeless norm, is no invention of Brant's, but a literary *topos* often used in satirical literature. Shapiro calls it "satire's chronic insistence that the gender inversion it is decrying is a *novelty*: 'effeminate' men are always a sad departure from the hardiness of their forbears: mannish women are always a newly aggressive and wholly uncharacteristic form of womanhood, incomprehensible to their sweetly docile grandmothers."⁷⁵ Also Ad Putter confirms:

By its very nature, effeminacy rhetoric seems to deny any kind of historical determination, for it typically appeals to timeless or "natural" norms of masculinity and femininity, with whose transgressions "womanly men" may be charged. Its historical consciousness tends to be limited to reminiscences of a period of time before the gender-trouble began, a time when the norms were still secure: when men behaved like men and women behaved like women.⁷⁶

By depicting actual gender transgressions as a kind of "accident," as spatially and temporally

⁷⁵Shapiro, 114.

⁷⁶Putter, 34.

restricted (a "novelty," a temporary aberration from the timeless and universal concept of masculinity and femininity) and potentially "curable," effeminacy rhetoric denies the uncomfortable notion that gender categories are inherently unstable. The title of Brant's fourth chapter ("Von nuwen funden") underscores this notion of gender-transgressions as (hopefully) short-lived "fads." Brant's satire functions as a bitter-tasting medicine designed for the cure of a society threatened or already morally "infected" by the transgression of these "timeless" norms.

b) Thomasin von Zerclaere: *Der welsche Gast*

Thomasin von Zerclaere's didactic treatise *Der welsche Gast* offers a similar, although even more poignant picture of the consequences of the feminization of men.⁷⁷ *Der welsche Gast*, written at the court of Wolfger von Erla in the years 1215/16, has been designated as a "Gebrauchsethik für Männer und Frauen der Oberschicht"⁷⁸ and is usually regarded as the

⁷⁷Thomasin von Zerclaere, *Der welsche Gast*, vol. 1, ed. F.W. von Kries (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1984). My quotations from Thomasin's *Der welsche Gast* are taken from this edition. A bibliography is included in volume 4 of F.W. von Kries's edition (published in 1985), on pages 175-183.

⁷⁸Klaus Düwel, "Lesestoffe für junge Adlige: Lektüreempfehlungen in einer Tugendlehre des 13. Jahrhunderts," *Fabula* 32 (1991): 67: "Everyday ethics for men and women of the upper class."

pinnacle of medieval didactic writing.⁷⁹ In its primary function as a "Fürstenspiegel" [Mirror of Rulers] *Der welsche Gast* differs from Sebastian Brant's *Narrenschiff* primarily in the audience which it addresses. The work consists of ten parts, which are only loosely connected by the topic of *staete* [steadiness, consistency], yet without showing any structure, thematic or otherwise.⁸⁰

Lines 4942-47 of the fourth part are accompanied by an illustration which depicts one woman and three men. One of the men is kneeling or sitting at the feet of the woman, who brandishes a whip or birch and commands: "Zu[e]ch hin di schu[e] schiere" [quick, take off my shoes], or, in another manuscript version, "Chlewel da schier" [quick, scratch there].⁸¹ The man obeys her order with the words: "Vil gerne liebe frauwe" [with pleasure, my dear lady]. What is illustrated here is the degeneration of a "natural" born master, a *herre*, to a slave. The ultimate cause of this humiliating state is, according to Thomasin, man's *unstecheheit* [unsteadiness], meaning his inability to remain in his place within the holy order of the world. Six ways are listed through which *unstecheheit* may reduce the human being to bondage, namely *girscheit* [greed], *hohvart* [pride or arrogance], *versmacheit* [a low opinion of other people], *uppicheit* [vanity], *toerscheit* [foolishness, stupidity] and *lecherheit* [lecherousness]. Although all six of these vices of *unstaete* are personified as women, or more exactly as *vrouwen* [courtly ladies], who in the best tradition of courtly love dominate

⁷⁹Klaus Manger, *Das "Narrenschiff": Entstehung, Wirkung und Deutung*. Erträge der Forschung 186. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1983), 20.

⁸⁰Ibid., 31-32.

⁸¹The texts of the manuscript versions are taken from volume 4 of F.W. von Kries's edition (see note above).

over their *Minnediener*, the illustration refers especially to the last mentioned sin of lecherousness. A lecherous man makes himself a slave not only of one, but of many ladies: "Trachheit unde leckerheit / Hu[o]rgelust unde Tru[o]nchenheit / die habend u[e]ber in gewalt" [laziness and lecherousness, lusting for whores and drunkenness have power over him].⁸² Consequently, a woman--and in this case Thomasin uses the term *wib* ("every-woman), not *frouwe* (courtly lady)--can assume power over a lecherous man through his sexuality, and is hence able to reverse the male-female power relationship.

Text and illustration are reminiscent of the classical motif of Aristotle and Phyllis, especially in their emphasis on uncontrolled male sexuality as the reason for a man's eventual downfall.⁸³ Thomasin's lecherous knight is feminized because he is ruled by the lower part of his body, by his sexuality, in a way only women were supposed to be,⁸⁴ and he consequently loses his superior position in the power relationship between the genders. Being ruled by emotion rather than reason makes a man "closer to woman," as was already pointed out by Thomas Aquinas.⁸⁵ Yet, despite the effeminate's closeness to woman, effeminacy is not a trait associated exclusively with homosexuality:

Effeminacy is a trait of excessive male desire regardless of object of choice, be

⁸²Lines 4921-23.

⁸³See Wolfgang Stammer, "Der Philosoph als Liebhaber," in *Wort und Bild: Studien zu den Wechselbeziehungen zwischen Schrifttum und Bildkunst im Mittelalter*, ed. Wolfgang Stammer (Berlin: Erich Schmitt Verlag, 1962), 12-44.

⁸⁴Davis, 125.

⁸⁵St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologia*, vol. 2 (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1947), 1757.

it, for lack of better terms, heterosexual or homosexual. Sexually induced effeminacy is always primarily about the fragility of the male subject, and heterosexual relationships disordered by excessive passion prove effeminating for men because they disrupt the very groundwork of cultural conceptions that define the essence of masculinity in strict self-discipline and psychic disavowals.⁸⁶

If one considers the above definitions of effeminacy, it is hardly surprising to find that in Thomasin's *Der welsche Gast* the feminization of the male partner in this heterosexual relationship automatically results in the inversion of gender roles, and that the idea of possible equality in appearance or power distribution never comes to mind. Elaine Tuttle Hansen, in contrast, in her interpretation of Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, regards feminization as a positive rather than a negative feature of the true (courtly) lover: "the heterosexual union idealized by the laws of Cupid values traits associated with femininity such as irrationality, self-sacrifice, submission, and service, and thus diminishes in theory both the differences and the power differential between male and female."⁸⁷ This potential equality between man and woman in an ideal heterosexual relationship is symbolized by the lovers' physical characteristics:

And the actual loss of gender differentiation that a successful heterosexual

⁸⁶Gary Spear, "Shakespeare's 'Manly' Parts: Masculinity and Effeminacy in *Troilus and Cressida*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 44 (1993): 417.

⁸⁷Elaine Tuttle Hansen, "The Feminization of Men in Chaucer's 'Legend of Good Women'," in *Seeking the Woman in Late Medieval and Renaissance Writings: Essays in Feminist Contextual Criticism*, ed. Sheila Fisher and Janet E. Halley (Knoxville: U of Tennessee Press, 1989), 61.

union might bring about, if two actually became one, is perhaps hinted at in the essential similarity of the most innocent and "true" lovers in the poem: Piramus and Thispe, who speak in one voice, both "wex pale" and are separated only by the cold wall their fathers have built (apparently in vain) to keep them apart.⁸⁸

In Hansen's interpretation of Chaucer's "The Legend of Thisbe" and "The Legend of Cleopatra" the heroes do not resemble the degenerate perfumed "popinjay" who appears so often in the chronicles and satires Shapiro uses as the basis of her interpretation,⁸⁹ and who receives so much ridicule in Brant's *Narrenschiff*. They rather represent ideal lovers, softened by courtly love, who must necessarily collide with the misogynous conventions of medieval patriarchal society. Nevertheless, Hansen also shows that the possibility of feminization inherent in courtly love is regarded as dangerous by many of the male lovers. Almost all of the courtly lovers in the stories of Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* seem to realize that the heterosexual union is "a dangerous state to settle down in, a place in which the manhood they are supposedly proving is in fact deeply threatened."⁹⁰ Feminization becomes even more obvious in case of the medieval court poet. Basing her case on R. F. Green's book *Poets and Princepleasers*, Hansen places the court poet in the position of woman: "like woman, he is a marginalized figure at court, who must be careful not to offend those of higher rank and authority; he seeks, like a wife or daughter, to please and entertain those who have power

⁸⁸Ibid., 62.

⁸⁹Shapiro, 117.

⁹⁰Hansen, 59.

over him."⁹¹ Self-effacement is one of the strategies the medieval court poet employs in order to signal his inferior position in relationship to his aristocratic audience:

It is almost as if literary etiquette demanded that the poet should conceal his own personality behind a series of socially acceptable masks. The claim that he was merely reporting what he had seen in a dream or what he had heard in the mouth of one of his characters allowed him to show suitable reticence, to avoid the social presumption implicit in setting himself up as an expert in the laws of love, and to defend himself against charges of impropriety or sacrilege.⁹²

Thus the medieval court poet, and especially the *Minnesänger*, might be seen as effeminized on two levels: on a sexual level as a courtly lover who willingly subjects himself to the whims of his lady, and on a societal level as a poet trying to make a living at court by catering to the cultural needs of his aristocratic audience.

The above observations lead us to two possible explanations for the negative picture offered in Thomasin's *Der welsche Gast*. The described encounter, although situated in the courtly context and indebted to the vocabulary of courtly love, might refer to the "everyday-" relationship between the genders outside the conventions of courtly love, or, alternatively, it could be regarded as a depiction of the courtly game of *Minnedienst* having "gone too far" by transgressing the boundary between courtly convention and actual, physical, societal gender

⁹¹Ibid., 55.

⁹²Richard Firth Green, *Poets and Princepleasers: Literature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: U of Toronto Press, 1980), 112.

relations. The illustration of the young man sitting at the feet of the lady would befit the court poet or *Minnesänger* much more than the young aristocrat playing the game of courtly love. The different use of the terms "frouwe" and "wib" in the text would speak in favour of both possibilities.

As the whip or birch, one of the most important symbols of power and authority in the Middle Ages, indicates, Thomasin's illustration furthermore attempts to show the interdependence between reversed gender roles and a disturbed world order. Especially the figure of the medieval teacher is often depicted with a birch or whip, symbolizing his profession and authority.⁹³ Thomasin himself provides a vivid illustration of the power-differential between the teacher and his pupil in picture no. 14 of *Der welsche Gast*. This illustration shows a schoolmaster, who is equipped with the typical symbol of his occupation, the birch, and is threatening or beating a naked child. The child's nakedness enhances the impression of his vulnerability in the face of the "master's" dominant authority.⁹⁴

By picturing a woman in this traditional position of authority over a man, Thomasin connects the spheres of private superiority and public/political authority. This connection between a man's personal freedom and his public power is emphasized in Thomasin's question in lines 4954-56: "wie mohte mir gebiten der / der du[o]rch ein wip hat so ser / sinen mu[o]t nider lazen?" [how could someone reign over me, who has lost his power because of a woman?] The fear which speaks out of the image of a man subjugated by a woman may have

⁹³See Shulamith Shahar, *Kindheit im Mittelalter*, trans. Barbara Brumm (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1993), 206.

⁹⁴See von Kries, vol. 4, pages 14 and 57.

its cause in the fact that it shows the reader a man "placed [...] in the position of woman."⁹⁵ As is amply documented in the didactic literature of the time,⁹⁶ it was regarded as a normal part of the duties of many medieval wives to take off their husband's shoes and to wash his feet,⁹⁷ and every husband had the right to beat his wife whenever it pleased him. Berthold von Regensburg, who is regarded as one of the most liberal authorities on the question of conjugal relations in the Middle Ages, repeatedly implores the men in his audience to reduce physical violence against their wives. One can get a glimpse of medieval reality from Berthold's witty remark that Eve was not created from the bone of Adam's head, but neither was she created from the bone of his feet:

Dar umbe solt dû ir daz hâr alle zît niht ûz ziehen umbe sus und umbe niht

⁹⁵Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver, "Introduction: Rereading Rape," in *Rape and Representation*, ed. Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver (New York: Columbia UP., 1991), 2.

⁹⁶See especially Cynthia Ho, "Spare the Rod, Spoil the Bride," *Medieval Feminist Newsletter* 21 (1996): 19-21.

⁹⁷This is amply documented in medieval books of deportment for women, such as *Le Ménagier de Paris*'s manual written for the instruction of his young wife in the years 1392 to 1394. *The Goodman of Paris (Le Ménagier de Paris): A Treatise on Moral and Domestic Economy by a Citizen of Paris (c. 1393)*, ed. and trans. Eileen Power (London: Routledge, 1928), 171. The act of a wife washing her husband's feet was not restricted to a specific social class. The wives of Tuscan notables, for example, assisted in their husbands "ablutions," even though they often had servants help them wash their own feet. Washing a husband's feet was not only a sign of a woman's subjugation to her husband, but was also of an intimate character, as might be seen from the following description of bedroom-activities among Tuscan notables: "Bedrooms were warm, inviting places, and married couples liked to spend time in them [...]. The husband instructed his young wife, who listened in deference and (according to Sacchetti) washed his feet." Charles de la Roncière, "Tuscan Notables on the Eve of the Renaissance," in *A History of Private Life: Revelations of the Medieval World*, eds. Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby, vol.2 (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard UP), 201 and 213. The description of delousing, however, seems to have been limited to peasants.

unde slahen wie dicke dich guot dünket unde schleten unde fluochen und
 ander böese handelunge tuon unverdient. Dû solt ouch niht guotiu kleider
 tragen unde sie diu bæsen unde diu smæhen.⁹⁸

Medieval didactic works, such as Marquard vom Stein's *Der Ritter vom Turn*, confirm these pictures of conjugal violence. Especially chilling in Marquard's work are two descriptions of a husband who strikes his wife in the face and thereby causes permanent disfigurement. The woman's deformed face makes her so hateful to her husband that he begins to look for sexual gratification outside of his home--an outcome for which the wife is blamed.⁹⁹

The picture that Thomasin's *Der welsche Gast* creates can be read as the reversal of the traditional medieval power relations between men and women, and may well symbolize the danger inherent in every relationship that is based on oppression: the ever-present threat that the slightest weakness on the part of the dominant party might inevitably lead to a reversal of power relations and turn the oppressor into the oppressed. While the more liberally minded modern reader might experience uneasiness when faced with such obvious male cruelty and inequality between the genders as depicted in the above examples, the average medieval reader experienced a similar uneasiness when confronted with Thomasin's depiction of the subjugation of the "wrong," i.e. the male gender.

The impression that the inverted relationship between men and women was supposed

⁹⁸Berthold von Regensburg, 329: "That does not mean that you should tear her hair out all the time for no good reason and beat her as much as you think appropriate, and scold and swear and do other bad deeds without reason. And you should also not wear the good clothes and she the bad and shabby ones."

⁹⁹Marquard vom Stein, *Der Ritter vom Turn*, ed. Ruth Harvey, *Texte des späten Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit* 32 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1988), 93-94; 108-109.

to make on the medieval reader is further indicated by the reaction of the two men who appear as observers and commentators in this illustration: "Solde der min geno[e]z sin" [should this man be my comrade?], asks the first one, and the second answers: "Nu[o]ne welle got daz ez geschehe" [may God prevent that]. This built-in audience suggests the reaction expected from the text's male audience: the depicted "ladies' man" has lost not only control over himself and consequently his power as master of the world, but also the respect of other men, and hence his right to remain in the homosocial¹⁰⁰ "brotherhood" of the courtly knights. In Thomasin's *Der welsche Gast* effeminacy is formally excluded from the sphere of masculinity, and the latter is "purified" by this act. My notions on the concepts of purity and pollution or dirt, are based on Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger*:

Dirt, then, is never an unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements. [...] In short, our pollution behaviour is the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications.¹⁰¹

The effeminate knight in Thomasin's work constitutes such an object or idea which confuses the established categories "male" vs. "female."

In order to maintain the traditional distinction between masculinity and femininity as the basis of the unequal distribution of power between the genders, Thomasin's effeminate

¹⁰⁰On the relationship between homosociality and medieval knighthood, see Part Two of this thesis.

¹⁰¹Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (1966; London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 35-36.

knight has to be symbolically obliterated. *Der welsche Gast* demonstrates that the young nobleman of the ruling class had a lot to lose if he left his assigned (privileged) place in the holy order of the medieval world and succumbed to his own appetites: he would lose his "masculinity" and (consequently) his dominant position in the relationship between the genders, the advantages and pleasures of male homosocial bonding, and, above all, his societal position as a medieval ruler, as a "master" of the world.

3.2. Fiction

a) *Nibelungenlied*

As in Sebastian Brant's *Narrenschiff*, clothing plays an important part in the Middle High German *Nibelungenlied*--here specifically in the construction of the figure of Brünhild.¹⁰² The story relates how in the seventh âventiure Brünhild appears fully armed at the place of the games which she has invented to test her potential wooers:

Dô was komen Prünhild. gewâfent man die vant,
sam ob si solde strîten umb elliu küniges lant.

¹⁰²*Das Nibelungenlied*, ed. Helmut de Boor, 21. ed. (Wiesbaden: F.A. Brockhaus, 1979). All quotations from the *Nibelungenlied* are taken from this text. Frakes, 267-87, offers a very recent (selected) bibliography that includes relevant literature on Marxist-feminist approaches and gender.

jâ truoc si ob den sîden vil manigen goldes zein.
 ir minneclîchiu varwe dar under hêrlîche schein.

Dô kom ir gesinde, die truogen dar ze hand
 von alrôtem golde einen schildes rant,
 mit stahelherten spangen, vil michel unde breit,
 dar under spilen wolde diu vil minneclîche meit.

Der vrouwen schiltvezzel ein edel porte was.
 dar ûfe lâgen steine grüene sam ein gras.
 der lûhte maniger hande mit schîne wider daz golt.
 er müeste wesen vil küene dem die vrouwe wurde holt.

Nibelungenlied, stanzas 434-6

*[And now Brunhild had arrived, armed as though about to contend for all the kingdoms in the world and wearing many tiny bars of gold over her silk, against which her face shone radiantly. Next came her retainers bearing a great, broad shield of reddest gold, with braces of the hardest steel, under which the enchanting maiden meant to dispute the issue. For its baldric her shield had a fine silk cord studded with grass-green gems whose variegated lustre vied with the gold of their settings. The man whom she would favour would have to be a very brave one...]*¹⁰³

¹⁰³*The Nibelungenlied*, trans. A.T. Hatto (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), 64-65.

Although it is certainly not uncommon in medieval literature for a hero to demonstrate his manly prowess in order to win the hand of a beautiful woman, the *Nibelungenlied* presents the reader with the less common variant of a queen who has to be defeated herself by her potential husband.¹⁰⁴ Not surprisingly, and in accordance with Biblical tradition, Brünhild's masculine gender role is judged negatively by the epic's characters as well as by its narrator(s). In stanza 438, even Hagen, arguably one of the *Nibelungenlied's* strongest and most fearless characters, expresses second thoughts about Gunther's marriage plans:

Alsô der starke Hagene den schilt dar tragen sach,
mit grimmigen muote der helt von Tronege sprach:
"wâ nu, künic Gunther? wie vliesen wir den lîp!
die ir dâ gert ze minnen, diu ist des tiuveles wîp."

Nibelungenlied, stanza 438

["What now, King Gunther?" stalwart Hagen of Troneck asked fiercely, on seeing the shield brought out. "We are done for--the woman whose love you desire is a rib of the Devil himself!"]¹⁰⁵

Her male attire and her ability to fight with "male" weapons not only render Brünhild physically unattractive in Hagen's eyes (and to some of the *Nibelungenlied's* male critics),¹⁰⁶ but also connect her to the devil, and thus dehumanize her. A "mannish" woman is no woman

¹⁰⁴On the various variants of the process of medieval *Brautwerbung*, see in detail Friedmar Geissler, *Brautwerbung in der Weltliteratur* (Naumburg (Saale): Tribüne, 1955).

¹⁰⁵Hatto, 65.

¹⁰⁶On the devaluation of Brünhild's beauty by scholarly medievalists, see Frakes, 159-160.

at all, but rather a vessel of hellish powers, and it is therefore not humiliating for Hagen to admit to his fear of Brünhild.¹⁰⁷ At the same time, the connection to the devil devalues Brünhild's strength as "unnatural," and thus makes it possible to uphold the traditional notion of the female sex as the weaker one. (It is interesting, though, that Siegfried's equally "unnatural" strength casts no doubt on his masculine physical superiority -- which demonstrates the extent to which the differences between men and women are a result of constructing "reality.")

Although the *Nibelungenlied* leaves no doubt that Brünhild is of female anatomical sex, her attire and weapons are disturbing indicators of a gender identity that is more "masculine" than was tolerable in medieval society. Therefore it is not surprising that later developments in the Brünhild-story make it clear that such a character has to be obliterated in order to maintain the traditional male-female gender system. How strongly clothing and weapons could influence the perception of a person's gender becomes even more obvious in another version of the Brünhild-story in the Old Icelandic "Sigrdrífumál" in the *Elder Edda* (about 1250). In the scene describing Sigurðr's first encounter with the Valkyrie Sigrdrífa (or Brynhildr), the text offers the following description of the heroine: "Sigurðr gekk í skjaldborgina ok sá, at þar lá maðr ok svaf með öllum hervápnnum. Hann tók fyrst hjálminn af

¹⁰⁷The notion that female power is unnatural, since influenced by the devil, is famous (or notorious) in the Middle Ages. It also appears for example in Berthold von Regensburg's already cited sermon "Von der Ê," where he explicitly condemns physical strength in women: "Nû sint die frouwen als küene für die man worden, sam sie mit dem tiuvel beheftet sîn, unde strîtent, als in der tiuvel daz swert gesegent habe..." ["Now women have become as bold as men as if they were afflicted by the devil, and they fight as if the devil had blessed their swords," 325).

höfði hánnum. Þá sá hann, at þat var kona."¹⁰⁸ The significance of clothing and weapons is obvious. At first sight, Sigurðr (and with him the reader) misinterprets the gender markers. However, after Sigurðr takes off the warrior's helmet and detects not only a female face, but (presumably) also long "feminine" hair, he has to correct his first assumption, and subsequently switches from the male to the female personal and possessive pronouns. The following lines relate how Sigurðr with his sword cuts Sigdrífa out of her armour, which is described as "föst sem hon væri holdgróin" ["as tight as if it were grown to the body"].¹⁰⁹ This skin-like tightness suggests that the armour is not only a part of Sigdrífa's body as it were, but also of her gender-identity, so that the act of cutting her out of it appears like the amputation of the (unwelcome) masculine traits of her personality. Thus, through the removal of the "wrong" male gender markers (helmet and armour) as well as through displaying the "right" feminine attributes (hair and body-shape) Sigurðr figuratively "makes" the Valkyrie Sigdrífa a woman. This episode demonstrates how gender markers function as gender "makers," and thus reveals the constructedness of the seemingly "natural" distinction between male and female.

The "masculine" physical strength Brünhild demonstrates during the games on Îsenstein makes it possible for her, at least for a short time, to take over the "male" role in her relationship with Gunther. Unwilling to consummate her marriage, Brünhild on her wedding-

¹⁰⁸"Sigdrífumál" in *Eddukvæði (Sæmundar-Edda)*, ed. Guðni Jónsson (Akureyri: Prentverk Odds Björnssonar, 1954), 305. "Sigurd went to the fence of shields and saw that a man/human being lay there and slept with all his weapons. First he took the helmet off his head. Then he saw that it was a woman."

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

night uses her physical strength to defend her virginity, visible symbol of her "bodily integrity."¹¹⁰ When Gunther attempts to win his resisting wife's love by force, i.e. when he tries to rape her, Brünhild counters violence with violence; and after she has bound Gunther with her silk girdle, she forces him to spend the rest of the night hanging on a nail. Although both measures are primarily meant to ensure that Brünhild can spend the night undisturbed by Gunther's violent sexual advances, the fact that she is only defending herself against Gunther's assault is, nevertheless, easily overlooked. Instead, the reader of this scene is left with the impression that it is actually Brünhild who is the violent party in the encounter, while Gunther appears as the victim of his wife's cruelty.

This misleading impression is a result of the text's biased account. Although the text acknowledges Gunther's attempt to rape his wife, the actual assault is described in only a single terse line in stanza 636 ("Dô rang er nâch ir minne / unt zerfuort' ir diu kleit" [then he struggled for her love / and tore her clothing apart]). In contrast, Brünhild's violent response to the assault and Gunther's suffering at her hand are related in great detail and take up more than four stanzas. This reluctance to dwell on Brünhild's rape is due less to a general unacceptability of rape in the Middle Ages than to the status of the rape-victim. Andreas Capellanus in his *De Amore*, a treatise on courtly love, depicts rape as socially acceptable if the rape-victim is a peasant girl. *De Amore* consists of three books which differ considerably in their evaluation of secular love: while the first and the second book depict courtly love as positive and ennobling, the third book rejects it vehemently. The following passage from

¹¹⁰Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Bantam, 1975), 8.

Book I of *De Amore* has elicited considerable discussion among critics, mainly centering around the question of the seriousness of Andreas's advice:

But if the love even of peasant women chances to entice you, remember to praise them lavishly, and should you find a suitable spot you should not delay in taking what you seek, gaining it by rough embraces. You will find it hard so to soften their outwardly brusque attitude as to make them quietly agree to grant you embraces, or permit you to have the consolations you seek, unless the remedy of at least some compulsion is first applied to take advantage of their modesty.¹¹¹

As Toril Moi has summarized, critics of Andreas's *De Amore* can be divided into four groups: the first group claims that Books I and II are serious, while the third book is a conventional retraction; the second group claims that all three books are serious; the third group maintains that Books I and II are ironic, while Book III is serious; and the fourth group considers all three books ironic.¹¹² Depending on their own critical opinion, readers must decide whether or not to believe in Andreas's permission to rape women of the lower social classes at will. However, medieval literature, too, sometimes depicts the rape of peasant girls and women as permissible; specific examples in French literature have been analyzed by Kathryn

¹¹¹*Andreas Capellanus on Love*, ed. P.G. Walsh (London: Duckworth, 1982), 223.

¹¹²Toril Moi, "Desire in Language: Andreas Capellanus and the Controversy of Courtly Love," in *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology and History*, ed. David Aers (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1986), 14.

Gravdal.¹¹³

Even though Capellanus does not offer the ultimate answer on the question of the rape of peasant women, raping women from the nobility was a serious offence. The wish to obscure Brünhild's rape may to a certain degree be motivated by the knowledge of the illicitness of the act; yet, I would claim, the narrator's wish to turn his audience's eyes and ears away from Brünhild's suffering can be explained by his strategy of depicting her less as the victim than as the perpetrator. It is the male partner, Gunther, who suddenly finds himself in the position into which he had tried to force Brünhild, namely the traditional position of medieval woman: "bound," helpless, and under the control of others. Moreover, Gunther's reluctance to go public about his shameful experience can be regarded as a trait that he shares with the traditional rape-victim. And even though on the following night Gunther (with the help of Siegfried) takes revenge for his humiliation, and assures the reader, and himself, that the "natural" distribution of power between the genders cannot be challenged permanently and without punishment, Brünhild has still managed to conjure up one of the worst nightmares of the masculine reader/listener: to be subjected to the uncontrolled forces of femininity and thereby be rendered feminine himself.

The male reaction to this reversal of gender roles is, as expected, negative. Siegfried makes sure that Brünhild "pays" for her "unwomanly" behaviour, and after being physically broken by Siegfried, she is "rape[d] into submission" by her husband Gunther--to use Jerold

¹¹³Kathryn Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania Press, 1991).

Frakes's refreshingly acid formulation.¹¹⁴ The tenth *âventiure* described in great detail the events that take place on this second wedding-night, a night that Brünhild (unknowingly) spends with two men instead of only one. After all the lights have been extinguished, Gunther waits anxiously listening in the pitch dark bed-chamber, while Siegfried, pretending to be Gunther, makes the first sexual advances to Brünhild. After a fierce struggle, Siegfried eventually manages to get the upper hand and to subdue Brünhild. Brünhild's following words of submission re-affirm the traditional male-female gender order:

Si sprach: künic edele, du solt mich leben lân.
 ez wirt vil wol versüenet, swaz ich dir hân getân.
 ich gewer mich nimmer mêre der edelen minne dîn.
 ich hân daz wol erfunden, daz du kanst vrouwen meister sîn."

Nibelungenlied, stanza 678

["Let me live, noble King!" said she. "I shall make ample amends for all that I have done to you and shall never again repel your noble advances, since I have found to my cost that you know well how to master a woman."] ¹¹⁵

At this point Siegfried slips out of the room while Gunther takes his place in the royal bed, where he takes what he regards as his due so vehemently that "von sîner heimlîche / si wart

¹¹⁴Frakes, 17. The *Nibelungenlied* is not the only place where the wedding-chamber is the site of a woman's violent initiation into her sexual role a wife, as can be seen from the following story. After her husband's death, an innkeeper's widow is married to a former guest whom she had once insulted with her grumbling. On their wedding-night, the groom ensures that his wife recognize her new master, "beating, brutalizing and otherwise insulting the unfortunate woman. Whipped, thrashed, and pummelled into obedience, the new bride swore in a broken voice that she would be an irreproachable spouse." Roncière, 208.

¹¹⁵*The Nibelungenlied*, trans. Hatto, 92.

ein lützel bleich" [from his intimacy [Brünhild] grew somewhat pale; stanza 681].

Gunther's fear of losing the respect of male courtly society leads him not only to confide in the only man he trusts to be able to "solve" his problem, namely Siegfried, but also to the statement that he would rather see his wife dead than endure any more humiliations (stanza 655). In a similar way, Siegfried regards his struggle with Brünhild as a symbol of the war between the genders and fears that a victory for Brünhild would set an example for other women and forever upset the traditional power (im)balance between the genders:

"Owê", dâht' der recke, "sol ich nu mînen lîp
 von einer magt verliesen, sô mugen elliu wîp
 her nâch immer mêre tragen gelphen muot
 gegen ir manne, diu ez sus nimmer getuot."

Nibelungenlied, stanza 673

*["Alas," thought the hero, "if I now lose my life to a girl, the whole sex will grow uppish with their husbands for ever after, though they would otherwise never behave so."]*¹¹⁶

Through their rape of Brünhild, Siegfried and Gunther react to the threat of a potential upheaval of womankind, symbolized by the figure of Brünhild, by physically and symbolically putting woman back in her original state of primeval fear of man's unique weapon, the penis. As Susan Brownmiller in her classic study of rape points out,

rape became not only a male prerogative, but man's basic weapon of force against woman, the principal agent of his will and her fear. His forcible entry

¹¹⁶Ibid.

into her body, despite her physical protestations and struggle, became the vehicle of his victorious conquest over her being, the ultimate test of his superior strength, the triumph of his manhood [...]. [Rape] is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which *all men* keep *all women* in a state of fear.¹¹⁷

As I will show in greater detail in my discussion of the epic *Kudrun*, rape or more specifically, *raptus* was tolerated neither in Roman law nor in medieval canon law.¹¹⁸

However, Brownmiller is correct in her emphasis on the role of *the fear of being raped* in the intimidation and subjugation of women -- a fear that is still potent in modern Western societies with their much more sophisticated and powerful laws against sexual harassment and rape. Of course, Brünhild's treatment on her wedding-night has rarely been regarded as rape either in the *Nibelungenlied* itself or by most modern critics of the text, partly so, no doubt, because Brünhild is violated by her own husband (and his friend). The concept of conjugal rape is relatively new and was certainly not known in the Middle Ages, yet the fact that the Middle Ages had no concept of conjugal rape does not mean that the act described in the *Nibelungenlied* might not be identified as such by modern readers.

Furthermore, Brünhild is victimized also on a second level. By presenting the rape scene partly from Siegfried's point of view and admitting the reader into the hero's secret thoughts and fears (stanza 673), the text enlists, as Kathryn Gravdal in her brilliant essay

¹¹⁷Brownmiller, 5.

¹¹⁸On medieval laws on *raptus*, see especially Brundage, "Rape and Seduction in the Medieval Canon Law," 141-158.

"Camouflaging Rape" calls this strategy, "the complicity of the listener, the better to delight in its representation of rape."¹¹⁹ The narrator's exclamation in stanza 681 "Hey, how the lovemaking caused her great strength to disappear!" not only points to his own position in the war between the genders, but seems to invite his audience, at least mentally, to join in the act of Brünhild's violent defloration. This same rhetorical strategy is also used in the description of the wedding feast and the first wedding night, where the reader is introduced into Gunther's thoughts and desires concerning Brünhild, related partly in indirect, partly even in direct speech:

Er dâhte, er læge sampfter der schoenen vrouwen bî.

dô was er des gedingen niht gar in herzen vrî,

im müese von ir schulden liebes vil geschehen.

[...]

In sabenwîzen hemedede si an daz bette gie.

dô dâht der ritter edele: "Nu hân ichz allez hie,

des ich ie dâ gerte in allen mînen tagen."

Nibelungenlied, stanzas 625 and 632

[He fancied it would be pleasanter beside his fair queen, for he was by no

means without hope in his heart that she would bring him much delight [...]

She went to the bed in a shift of fine white linen, and the noble knight thought

¹¹⁹Kathryn Gravdal, "Camouflaging Rape: The Rhetoric of Sexual Violence in the Medieval Pastourelle," *Romanic Review* 76 (1985): 362.

to himself: "Now I have everything here that I ever wished for."]¹²⁰

Brünhild's thoughts and feelings, on the other hand, are never expressed verbally, and can only be deduced from her violent reactions, which come to the audience already filtered through the perception of the narrator. Through insight into the thoughts of only the male characters Siegfried and Gunther, the reader is led to an identification with the male point of view of the rapists. Hence, Brünhild loses the mental and moral support of those readers who do not make a conscious effort to resist the temptation of being drawn into the text's (main-) stream of thought, its ideology of male domination and female subordination. As Susann Samples formulates it in the context of a similar case, the rape of Ginover in Heinrich von dem Türlin's *Diu Crône*, "with this narrative device, Heinrich maintains his complete control of the audience's vision, and Ginover's experience, that is, her victimization, is suppressed."¹²¹ Like *Diu Crône*, the *Nibelungenlied* demonstrates that when it comes to the matter of rape, "who is speaking may be *all* that matters."¹²² Brünhild's sexual defeat in the bed-chamber mirrors her earlier physical defeat in the games and thus reveals an intimate relationship between the heterosexual act and the act of the physical subjugation and societal disenfranchisement of women, thereby revealing not only the degree to which the personal is indeed political, but at the same time exposing the penis in a very literal sense as patriarchy's "unique weapon."

¹²⁰*The Nibelungenlied*, trans. Hatto, 87-88.

¹²¹Susann Samples, "The Rape of Ginover in Heinrich von dem Türlin's *Diu Crône*," in *Arthurian Romance and Gender*, 201.

¹²²Higgins and Silver, 1.

b) *Wolfdietrich B*

The manuscript version B of the Middle High German epic *Wolfdietrich*¹²³ relates how Hugdietrich, the young prince of Constantinople, deliberately "transforms" himself into a woman in order to woo the beautiful princess Hiltburc of Salnecke (Saloniki), who is being held in captivity by her father. Hugdietrich, who in stanza 2 is described as "klein an dem libe" [of small stature] and "wolgeschaffen" [well formed], obviously encounters little psychological or technical difficulty in changing his outer appearance, as well as his voice and habits, into those of the female gender:

Dô lernte Hugdieterîch wol ein ganzes jâr
 also wæhe wûrken, daz sage ich iu für wâr:
 swaz si im vor worhte, sîn getriuw meisterîn,
 des wart er ouch meister zuo den henden sîn.

Nâch wîplicher stimme sô kêrte er sînen munt;
 daz hâr liez er wahsen an der selben stunt.
 dô wart er vil schœne unde ouch minniclîch,

¹²³*Ortnit und die Wolfdietriche*, ed. Arthur Amelung and Oskar Jänicke (1871; reprint: Dublin, Zürich: Weidmann, 1968). My quotations from *Wolfdietrich* are taken from this edition. The epic *Wolfdietrich* exists in three different versions, which, however, are so different that they are usually regarded as three individual works. The Hugdietrich story is unique to the version *Wolfdietrich B*. For an overview over the relatively sparse critical literature on *Wolfdietrich*, see Roswietha Wisniewski, *Mittelalterliche Dietrich-Dichtung* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1986), 153-166.

oberhalb der gürtel einer frouwen gar gelîch.

Wolfdietrich stanzas 26-27

[And I tell you the truth: for a whole year Wolfdietrich learned to do needlework so skilfully that whatever kind of needlework his faithful master-craftswoman showed him, he mastered as well as she did. He changed his voice to that of a woman and at the same time he let his hair grow. He then became very beautiful and also lovely; above the girdle he looked like a woman.]

But Wolfdietrich's "transformation" into a woman is more than a mere disguise, since it involves the acquisition of a complete female gender-role, symbolized by the needlework, probably the most typical female craft in the Middle Ages.¹²⁴ Moreover, Hugdietrich's outer appearance is meant to be deceptively feminine, for he attempts to convince Hiltburc's family that he is a perfect female companion to stay with their daughter Hiltburc in the tower to which she has been confined by her father. And indeed, his careful preparations and his natural physical propensities help Hugdietrich to "pass" as a woman in the eyes of Hiltburc's family, so that he is permitted to keep their daughter's company. For eight weeks, while living alone in the tower with Hiltburc, Hugdietrich performs his female gender-role so perfectly that he at no time arouses suspicion concerning his "true" gender. Yet when one day Hugdietrich's desire overpowers him and he begins to make sexual advances to Hiltburc, the secret of his masculinity, quite literally, reveals itself:

¹²⁴On typical female occupations in the Middle Ages, see Françoise Piponnier, "The World of Women," in *A History of Women*, 323-335.

Er umbevienc si mit armen, zuo im er si beslôz;
 sîn halsen und sîn küssen daz wart alsô grôz.
 dô sich nu diu minne niht lenger mohte verheltn,
 do begund sich sîn geselle vil bald her für steln.

Wolfdietrich, stanza 87

[He took her into his arms and embraced her, and his kissing and hugging became very strong. When love could no longer hide herself, his "companion" very soon began to stand up.]

Male anatomy, represented by the "geselle," i.e. the penis, and the expression of active "masculine" desire, interfere with the female gender role displayed by Hugdietrich and reveal the seemingly homoerotic encounter between two young women as, in reality, a heterosexual act. Hiltburc's later pregnancy confirms Hugdietrich's masculine "potency," and the child that is born is a boy: Wolfdietrich.

Interesting about Hugdietrich's "cross-dressing" is that neither he himself nor others seem to have any objection to his (temporary) gender-role reversal. Although Hugdietrich's transformation finds ample justification in his quest for the hand of Hiltburc, the reader is left with the feeling that Hugdietrich actually enjoys his female gender-role. This feeling is probably strengthened by the fact that Hugdietrich from the beginning is described as endowed with feminine traits, such as bodily grace and beauty. Thus it is hardly surprising that there are no indications that Hugdietrich as a man would have "natural" problems in dealing with such female tasks as needlework or that he would feel humiliated by his role--a role which he himself has chosen without even considering any other option, such as, for

example, abduction. On the contrary, Hugdietrich even surpasses his teacher in specific female tasks, such as his needlework, and later is actually able to instruct other women. The reader only has to compare Hugdietrich with his son, Wolfdietrich, to realize the degree to which Hugdietrich from the beginning of the story appears inherently unaggressive, basing his survival on intellectual powers and diplomacy rather than on physical strength and violence. The haste in which Hugdietrich takes his farewell from the pregnant Hiltburc and leaves it up to her and her mother Liebgart to appease her father Walgunt, seems especially "unmanly." Hugdietrich does not even offer to return with troops and to rescue Hiltburc from the wrath of her father, but only advises her to care for their child and to follow him, if (and when) she finds the possibility to do so. For Bertold von Regensburg, a man like Wolfdietrich, who spins rather than fights, would certainly have constituted a prime example for the transgression of God-given gender boundaries, unworthy of ever entering God's Kingdom.

For this reason, it seems even more surprising that other characters in the story do not offer any criticism when they finally learn about Hugdietrich's "true" gender. Hiltburc's father Walgunt expresses only admiration for Hugdietrich's successful disguise and gladly accepts him as his son-in-law. Hiltburc's mother Liebgart alludes to Hugdietrich's unusual expertise when congratulating him on his skilful needlework (to which he answers only with loud laughter, stanza 244), but does not seem to doubt his "true" masculinity. What seems to make Hugdietrich's role-reversal acceptable are his explanation given to Walgunt that unusual circumstances demand unusual methods ("ir wollt si nieman geben / die edelen künigîn: / dô muost ich mit listen / werben umb die frouwen mîn" [you did not want to give her to anyone,

the noble queen, so I had to woo my lady with cunning; stanza 236]) and the knowledge that his intentions are of an exclusively heterosexual nature. Hugdietrich's heterosexual drive, symbolized by his "geselle," causes him to endanger his own life to pursue a woman who otherwise would be lost to the marriage market and thus to exchange among males.

Walgunt's "unnatural," latently incestuous, desire to keep his daughter for himself provokes Hugdietrich's equally "unnatural" reversal of gender roles, with the ultimate goal of restoring heterosexual "normality." The heterosexual quest for an otherwise unattainable woman, which serves as the framework of Hugdietrich's transgression of gender boundaries, as well as his use of *list*, a medieval concept which traditionally includes unconventional methods,¹²⁵ seem to be sufficient to make his temporary role reversal acceptable and sexually unambiguous in the eyes of others.

And as much as Hugdietrich seems to merge into his female gender-role and to manage to "pass" in the story, the medieval listener or reader is never totally deceived. Not only is she or he aware from the beginning that Hugdietrich is in reality a man, but through the almost exclusive use of the masculine personal pronoun "er" the text makes certain that this fact is never forgotten. In Marjorie Garber's terms, the reader here is looking *through* rather than *at* the transvestite.¹²⁶ Moreover, in his relationship to Hildburc, Hugdietrich plays

¹²⁵Middle High German *list* is not used in the sense of "deceit" or "deception," but denotes positive (mental) skills, *Verstandesleistung*, and especially the ability to foresee and plan future events. Actions which to the modern reader will seem deceptive and unethical, such as the exchange of Isolde for Brangaene on King Marke's wedding night in Gottfried von Straßburg's *Tristan* or Siegfried's and Gunther's actions during the games on *Îsenstein* and on Gunther's wedding night, are therefore legitimate and not at all dishonourable to the medieval audience or readership.

¹²⁶Garber, 9.

the dominant, "masculine," part even in the disguise of a woman, since in his role as Hildburc's instructor in feminine tasks he already inhabits the superior "teacher" position in their relationship, a position he automatically keeps after the disclosure of his "real" gender. Hugdietrich's brilliant feminine skills might be interpreted as an assertion of superior masculinity even when in female disguise, symbolized by Hugdietrich's position as the "best" of all women. A man is thus superior to women not only as a man, but even when performing the role of a woman: his inherent masculine superiority makes him the better "woman" compared to "real" women. The question one might still speculate about is, of course, whether Hugdietrich ever was a "real" man. Yet even though the modern reader might feel ambivalent about this beautiful young man who so easily transgresses the boundary between male and female, there are no indications in the text that the medieval author shared this feeling.

c) Ulrich von Liechtenstein: *Frauendienst*

Diu werde kuneginne Venus, gottinne über die minne, enbiutet al den rittern,
 die ze langparten und ze friul und ze Kernden und ze Stir und ze Oesterrich,
 ze Beheim gesezzen sint, ir hulde und ir gruoze und tuot in kunt, daz si durch ir
 liebe zuo in varn wil, und wil si leren, mit wiegetanen dingen si werder
 frouwen minne verdienen und erwerben suln.[...] Swelch ritter gegen ir kumt

und ein sper wider si entzweie gestichet, dem gibt si ze miet ein guldin
vingerlin; daz sol er senden dem wibe, diu im diu liebest ist.[...] Stichet min
vrowe venus deheinen ritter nider, der sol envier enden in die werlt nigen
einem wibe ze eren.

Ulrich von Liechtenstein, *Frauendienst*, 106

[*The worthy queen Venus, the goddess of love, offers her grace and her greetings to all the knights who live in Lombardy, Friaul, Carinthia, Styria, Austria and Bohemia, and announces to them that she, because of her love, plans to travel to them; and she wants to teach them the kind of things with which they can earn the love of worthy ladies.[...] Whichever knight opposes her and breaks a lance on her will receive a golden ring which he shall send to the woman whom he loves best.[...] If my lady Venus pushes a knight to the ground, he shall bow to the four corners of the world in honour of a woman.*]

This is how the knight Ulrich von Liechtenstein in his fictional autobiography *Frauendienst*¹²⁷ announces his spectacular *Venusfahrt* to a dazzled and fascinated courtly world. The account of the *Venusfahrt* presents the audience with a courtly knight carefully dressed up in selected female attire, donned in honour of his *Minnedame*, his courtly lady. In the disguise of *Frau Minne*, Ulrich travels through several countries, challenges nearly every

¹²⁷Ulrich von Liechtenstein, *Frauendienst*, ed. Franz Viktor Spechtler (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1987). Quotations from Ulrich von Liechtenstein's *Frauendienst* are taken from this edition. Spechtler offers an extensive chronological bibliography for the period between 1875 to 1987. Further, and sometimes even older, critical literature may be found in John Wesley Thomas, ed. and trans., *Ulrich von Liechtenstein's Service of Ladies* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1969).

knight who wishes to joust with him, enjoys the admiration of the ladies he meets, and, after having used up 307 lances and given away 271 gold rings, eventually abandons the role of the goddess of love and changes back to the knight Ulrich von Liechtenstein.

As Vern Bullough convincingly points out with respect to Ulrich's *Venusfahrt*, "apparently most of the people on his tour got into the act, and it seemed to be great fun."¹²⁸ It becomes obvious that Ulrich manages to make his violation of almost all medieval gender norms seem funny, and that he can assure his audience (inside and outside the text) that his transgressive acts pose no threat, either to his own traditional male gender identity or to the whole concept of medieval masculinity. This rather surprising example of a positively received violation of gender norms may be explained in part by the frameworks in which the transgressive acts are embedded (namely those of medieval *Minnedienst* and medieval theatre play) and in part by Ulrich's way of undermining his own transgressions. It is now widely agreed that the medieval concept of *Minnedienst* and the relationship between *Minnedame* and *Minnediener* have to be regarded as highly artificial constructs and should be clearly distinguished from the relationship between knights and ladies in everyday life. Kathryn Gravdal summarizes current questions about the relationship between courtly love and medieval society as follows: "what is [courtly love's] relation to lived experience? is it anything other than a string of formulae? is it a stable idea throughout the Middle Ages, or a flimsy invention of modern scholars?"¹²⁹ She concludes with the following opinion:

¹²⁸Vern Bullough, "On Being a Male in the Middle Ages," in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Clare A. Lees (Minneapolis, London: U of Minnesota Press, 1994), 37.

¹²⁹Gravdal, 363.

In my own view, the literary discourse on courtly love, which revered the aristocratic lady, gave her sexual freedom and dominion over her lover, promoted aesthetic and social refinement and a feminized code of conduct, never existed in reality, but was part of the medieval hegemony: a male warrior hegemony of the medieval aristocracy, that had little to do with women, nothing to do with love, and was intent upon strengthening the power of an aristocratic patriarchy.¹³⁰

Also Georges Duby, although granting the model of courtly love a softening long-term effect on medieval men and matrimonial strategies, regards it as a fantasy, as "a game controlled by men":

The game of love did not disturb and in fact strengthened the social hierarchy, in which women were subordinate to men. Once the game was over and everyone returned to serious business, the *amie* returned to the place God intended for her kind, her "gender," under the strict authority of the man on whom she depended as wife, daughter, or sister.¹³¹

The notion that medieval courtly love was a sophisticated aristocratic game with little influence on the everyday life of its participants finds its reflection in Ruediger Schnell's distinction between the *Frauensklave* (the woman's slave: a man subjugated to a real, everyday woman) and the *Minnesklave* (the *minne*'s slave: a knight who devoted his life to

¹³⁰Ibid.

¹³¹Georges Duby, "The Courtly Model, " in *A History of Women*, 262-263.

the service of the concept *minne*, rather than to an actual woman).¹³² It was considered emasculating to be dominated by the despised "real" women of the Middle Ages, but it posed no threat to masculinity to serve the ethical concept of unfulfilled love. As Duby points out:

[courtly love] was able, at any rate, to influence the attitude of certain men toward *certain* women, for the same class division that existed among men carried over to women. Thus "ladies" (*dames*) and "maidens" (*pucelles*) were sharply distinguished from peasant women (*vilaines*), whom the men of the court could treat as brutally as they pleased. But the ladies and maidens invited to join the game of courtly love were entitled to certain marks of respect and, while the game lasted, enjoyed some power over their male partners.¹³³

Kate Millett, however, argues that even the temporary power that courtly love granted some selected women helped to re-enforce and perpetuate misogynistic attitudes and thus eventually proved destructive to women's actual position in medieval society:

While a palliative to the injustice of woman's social position, chivalry is also a technique for disguising it. One must acknowledge that the chivalrous stance is a game the master group plays in elevating its subject to pedestal level. Historians of courtly love stress the fact that the raptures of the poets had no effect upon the legal or economic standing of women, and very little upon their social status.¹³⁴

¹³²Ruediger Schnell, *Causa Amoris*, 452-505.

¹³³Duby, "Courtly Model," 256. His emphasis.

¹³⁴Millett, 37.

The knight Ulrich von Liechtenstein in the disguise of Lady Venus might stand as a symbol for the way in which medieval aristocratic society disguised the actual power-relations between men and women through the courtly game of love.

The discrepancy between *Minnedienst* and everyday gender relations is made obvious in Ulrich's *Frauendienst* when Ulrich interrupts his *Venusfahrt* for his *Minnedame* in order to spend some days with his wife and family. The inverted gender relationship between *Minnediener* and *Minnedame* is put into perspective by the more traditional depiction of Ulrich in the role of the male head of his own family:

Diu guot enpfie mich also wol
 also von reht ein frowe sol
 enphahen ir vil lieben man.
 Ich het ir liebe dran getan,
 daz ich zuo ir was dar bechomen:
 min chunft ir truren het benomen.

Frauendienst, stanza 708

[My good [wife] received me as well as it was a wife's duty to receive her beloved husband. I had done something good to her by visiting her, my arrival had taken her sadness away.]

While Ulrich in his role as *Minnediener* has to, and does, accept numerous rejections by his *Minnedame*, in his relationship to his wife he displays his traditional male superiority and thereby demonstrates that he knows his actual place in the relationship between the genders very well--in contrast to, for example, the young knight ridiculed in Thomasin von Zerclaere's

Der welsche Gast, who, as the prototype of the *Frauensklave*, violates actual societal gender norms.

Yet not only the conventions of medieval *Minnedienst*, but also those of the medieval stage allow Ulrich to picture himself in the most "unmanly" of roles, namely the role of woman, without incurring any criticism. As Vern Bullough points out,

men... were allowed to impersonate women, even to assume the manners and actions of the female, but only in carefully designated situations, where the presence of women was considered unacceptable. One such place was on the stage, where for the most part proper women did not appear.¹³⁵

Karl Mantzius in his *History of Theatrical Art* confirms that on the stage "the more important female parts were performed by half grown-up youths, and particular care was taken to choose young men who were beardless and good-looking, and whose voices were not yet breaking."¹³⁶ Mantzius offers an intriguing, and often quoted, example of such a stage performance which he takes from the chronicles of the town of Metz.

Thus we read about a barber's apprentice, who reaped great success in Metz at the performance of *The Life and Sufferings of St Barabara* (1485). "At that time," the chronicle says, "there lived in Metz a young barber's apprentice named Lyonard [...] who performed the part of St Barabara so thoughtfully and reverently that several persons wept for pity; for he showed such fluency

¹³⁵Vern Bullough, "On Being a Male," 36.

¹³⁶Karl Mantzius, *A History of Theatrical Art in Ancient and Modern Times*, trans. Louise von Cossel, vol. 2 (London: Duckworth & Co., 1903), 88.

of elocution and such polite manners, and his countenance and gestures were so expressive when among his maidens, that it pleased everybody and could not have been better done..."¹³⁷

The similarities between Ulrich von Liechtenstein's *Venusfahrt* and the genre of the medieval theatre becomes obvious from the beginning, when Ulrich in the best tradition of *le Cry*, the French expression for the public invitation to a theatre play, announces his plan to entertain his audience with a performance of Lady Venus, the Goddess of Love. Furthermore, the way in which Ulrich during his *Venusfahrt* travels from "stage" to "stage" reminds the reader of the wanderings of medieval minstrels, as they are described for example in E. K. Chambers's *The Medieval Stage*:

In little companies of two or three, they padded the hoof along the roads, travelling from gathering to gathering, making their own welcome in castle or tavern, or, if need were, sleeping in some grange or beneath the wayside hedge in the white moonlight.¹³⁸

Although Ulrich von Liechtenstein's *Venusfahrt* is certainly much more luxurious than the travels of his poorer "colleagues," and the only reward he hopes and needs to earn is the favour of his *Minnedame*, his *Venusfahrt* successfully imitates the nomadic structure of the life of the wandering minstrels. Moreover, Ulrich manages to create his own appearance in a way which in its gaudiness again reminds the reader of medieval professional actors:

¹³⁷Ibid., 89.

¹³⁸E. K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, vol. 1 (London: Oxford UP, 1903; reprint London: Lowe and Brydone, 1948), 25.

You might know them [the minstrels] from afar by their coats of many colours, gaudier than any knight might respectably wear, by the instruments upon their backs and those of their servants, and by the shaven faces, close-clipped hair and flat shoes proper to their profession.¹³⁹

The comparisons make obvious that, in addition to the concept of medieval *Minnedienst*, Ulrich uses the similarities between his *Venusfahrt* and the medieval theatre performance and its sanctioned practice of role-playing and disguise as a framework in which he can safely embed his transgression of gender boundaries.

Yet even within the context of the courtly game of *Minnedienst*, Ulrich's *Venusfahrt* is meant to be an unheard-of "feat" in honour of his lady, comparable to, or even excelling, conventional deeds of prowess. Thus, in order to make his *Venusfahrt* as unambiguous as possible in the eyes of the judging male society, the *Minnediener* Ulrich undermines his female gender-performance by sending out signals to his audience emphasizing his male gender identity. He not only makes his disguise easily penetrable (for instance when in stanza 514 he appears "in vrowen chleit nach riters siten" [in lady's dress yet behaving like a knight]), but also demonstrates his knightly virtues in numerous sword fights, and shows an especially (conventionally masculine) courtly treatment of the ladies he encounters. As June Hall Martin points out in a similar context, the *Minnediener* has to achieve a balance between knightly manliness and the softness of the courtly lover:

The necessity of the *militia* element is evident. The knight who proves himself to be totally equal to his manly duties in battle can perhaps afford any

¹³⁹Ibid., 44-45.

weakness which may have been inherent in love sickness, with its obligatory fears, groans, and sighs.¹⁴⁰

By accomplishing his manly deeds of prowess in the disguise of *Lady Venus*, the Goddess of Love herself, Ulrich manages to combine the worlds of love and *âventiure* in the most perfect way. Although it is certainly correct that, as for example Rüdiger Krohn insists, Ulrich's combination of masculine and feminine gender markers serves to a certain degree to achieve a humorous effect,¹⁴¹ I would claim that it also fulfills the function of an "emergency exit" which allows Ulrich to utilize the female gender role without manoeuvring himself into a position which could become dangerous to his masculinity.

This becomes especially obvious when examining the three opponents Ulrich initially refuses to fight against. In stanzas 619-636 he rejects the challenge of a monk three times, and finally agrees to joust with him only because of the pressure his friends exert on him. Although Ulrich offers no reason for his rejection, except for his unwillingness to engage in combat with a man in a monk's habit, it is possible that the monk's "feminized" position owing to his celibacy is responsible for Ulrich's decision. This suspicion becomes stronger in the light of the other two examples. When in stanza 686 Ulrich is challenged by the "windisch wip" (here presumably meaning a "slavic" woman), he tries to "neutralize" her challenge by putting it into a sexual context:

¹⁴⁰June Hall Martin, *Love's Fools: Aucassin, Troilus, Calistro and the Parody of the Courtly Lover* (London: Tamesis Book LTD, 1972), 17.

¹⁴¹Rüdiger Krohn, "Der man verkert sich in ein frauen," in *Popular Drama in Northern Europe in the Later Middle Ages: A Symposium*, ed. Flemming G. Andersen et al. (Odense: Odense UP, 1988), 144-45.

Ich smielt und hiez dem boten sagen:

"swa ich noch ie bi minen tagen
 getyostirt het wider diu wip,
 da waer gar harnasch bloz min lip
 gegen ir aller tyost gewesen,
 und bin doch vor in wol genesen;
 ir tyost tuot herzenlichen wol,
 gegen in sich niemen wapen sol."

Frauendienst, stanza 688

*[I smiled and had the messenger announce: Whenever in my days I have
 jousted with women, my body was devoid of armour against all their fighting
 and still I survived them all. Struggling with them feels good and nobody
 should be armoured for such a struggle.]*

The strategy of putting women (back) in their place by reminding them that their only field of combat and power lies in heterosexual intercourse is even more emphatic in another medieval text, namely the anonymous *maere*¹⁴² entitled *Der Frauen Turnei*.¹⁴³ This tale relates the story of a group of courtly ladies who, during the absence of their male relatives,

¹⁴²On the history of the (different) definition(s) of the MHG *maere* and for an overview of the current discussion of the general usefulness of this rather ambiguous genre, see Joachim Heinzle, "Kleine Anleitung zum Gebrauch des Märenbegriffs," in *Kleinere Erzählformen im Mittelalter: Paderborner Colloquium 1987*, ed. Klaus Grubmüller et al. (Paderborn, München, Wien, Zürich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1988), 45-48.

¹⁴³"Der Frauen Turnei," in *Gesamtabenteuer*, ed. Heinrich Friedrich von der Hagen, vol. 1. (Stuttgart and Tübingen: J. G. Cotta'scher Verlag, 1850), 367-382.

dress up as knights in order to hold their own tournament, a ladies' tournament. The returning knights soon realize what has happened, but after some discussion refrain from punishing the women for their inversion of the world order:

der ander sprach: "wir suln sie slân;

Wellen sie turnieren varn,

sô mueze wir daz hûs bewarn.

Hât sie der tiuvel daz gelêrt?

wie sich diu werlt hât verkêrt!

[...]

Ein ander sprach, der stuont dâ bî;

"ez dunket mich niht guot (ge)sîn;

Wir sul[le]n sie niht darumbe slân..."

Der Frauen Turnei, v. 289-94; 297-99

[The other said: "We should beat them; if they want to go to tournaments we have to keep house. Has the devil taught them that? How the world has turned upside-down! Another, who was standing close, said: "This does not seem good to me; we should not beat them because of this..."]

The tale ends with a *pointe* when the bravest of the women, the leader in the tournament, is married to a rich man and from then on has to restrict her field of struggle to the marital bed:

Der vrouwen turnei heizt diz mærl'.

sie kunnen brechen herte sper,

Daz ist ein michel wunder:

sie ligent stæte under,
 Und behaldent doch den prîs,
 der man sî junk oder grîs.

Der Frauen Turnei, v. 407-412

[*The tale is called the ladies' tournament. They can break hard lances, which is a great wonder: they always lie on the bottom and yet still keep the prize, be the man young or old.*]

Here again one finds the strategy of turning a woman's wish and ability to fight with traditionally male weapons into an obscenity when the lance the woman breaks in the ladies' tournament is replaced by her husband's erect penis. As Sarah Westphal-Wihl points out, the Middle High German word *underligen* in this context may be translated both by "to be vanquished militarily and to lie on the bottom" -- which adds a second component to the *maere's* pointe.¹⁴⁴ At the same time, I would argue, this double meaning fuses the woman's "masculine" combative strength with her "feminine" sexual "power," and thus effectively neutralizes her former "knightly" prowess. William H. Jackson points to another erotic component embedded in the description of the ladies being helped into their armour in lines 161-168: "Das erotische Moment besteht hier darin, daß die Aufmerksamkeit gezielt auf eine Berührung des Intimbereichs der Damen gelenkt wird, indem der Erzähler die Handbewegungen evoziert, die beim Festbinden der Schutzpolsterung für Schenkel und

¹⁴⁴Sarah Westphal-Wihl, "The Ladies' Tournament: Marriage, Sex, and Honor in Thirteenth-Century Germany," *Signs* 14 (1989): 396.

Hüfte notwendig sind."¹⁴⁵ Also here the infusion of eroticism serves to weaken, if not to neutralize, the disturbing potential inherent in the ladies' attempts at reversing traditional gender roles.

Although this *maere*, too, connects the women's transgressive acts with fiendish influences by assuming that they were taught by the devil ("Hât sie der tiuvel daz gelêrt?" v. 292), the text insinuates a second explanation for the temporary reversal of the world order by pointing to the societal position of the female leader of the tournament. As it turns out, the brave female warrior, although no longer young, is still unmarried because of her poverty. Her marriage serves not only to provide the *maere* with the above mentioned obscene *pointe*, but it also neutralizes her active (masculine) energy by re-channelling it into heterosexual intercourse. Thus the act of marrying off the successful female leader of the women's tournament serves primarily the interests of the knights and medieval society, while ignoring, and thereby undermining, the tournament's original aim, namely to let the women have their own part in the chivalric deeds and honour of their men. Friedrich Heinrich von der Hagen, for example, expresses genuine admiration for the tournament's female leader, but at the same time regards her subsequent marriage as the ultimate prize to crown her efforts: "...eine herrliche Erscheinung darin [i.e. in the tournament] ist die kräftige Jungfrau, welche ritterlich den Preis erstreitet und auch ritterlich dafür belohnt wird."¹⁴⁶ Von der Hagen's rather

¹⁴⁵William H. Jackson, "Das Märe von dem Frauenturnier," in *Kleinere Erzählformen*, 126: "What constitutes the erotic moment is that the attention is purposefully directed at the touching of the ladies' intimate regions. This is achieved through the narrator's evocation of the hand's movements necessary for the tightening of the safety cushioning at thigh and hip."

benevolent description of this women's tournament as merely motivated by female curiosity to find out more about the life of men, seems to imply that he regards the women's transgression as inherently unthreatening. And yet, as Sarah Westphal-Wihl puts it:

the women's actual accomplishment, to secure an honorable marriage for their most impoverished member, differs radically from their expressed intention, for the subject of marriage never enters the debate that initiates the joust.¹⁴⁷

The restoration of the traditional medieval world order is finally symbolized on the most private level by the position of the newly-weds during sexual intercourse, featuring the man on top and the woman underneath. As it turns out, in this text, too, the personal is highly political.

Ulrich von Liechtenstein employs the same symbolism in order to express his disapproval of a "perverted" world in which women trespass on male territory. If one keeps in mind that, at the time of his rejection of the "windisch wip," Ulrich himself is dressed up as a woman who jousts, it becomes clear that he is not only aware of his underlying masculinity and at no time identifies with women or their situation, but also that he wants his audience to distinguish between a man who is playing the role of a jousting woman and a woman who actually jousts. As Mary Daly succinctly defines this strategy of the typical drag queen, "like whites playing 'black face,' he incorporates the oppressed role without being incorporated by

¹⁴⁶Friedrich Heinrich von der Hagen, *Gesamtabenteuer*, vol. 1, CXLII: "a splendid appearance in the tournament makes the strong virgin who in a knightly manner wins her prize and who is rewarded in a knightly way."

¹⁴⁷Westphal-Wihl, 379-380.

it."¹⁴⁸ The above outlined distinction between the artificial, male-created and male-oriented world of *Minnedienst* and the actual situation of the medieval woman, finds its reflection in this encounter between Ulrich and the "windisch wip."

While the conflict between Ulrich and the "windish wip" eventually resolves itself when Ulrich learns that his allegedly female opponent is in reality another knight in disguise, his subsequent encounter with the knight Hademar proves to be more difficult for him to deal with. Stanzas 874-892 relate how Ulrich postpones a sword-fight with Hademar because of his tiredness, but a rumour evolves which claims that his refusal stems from the assumption that Hademar "liebet die man," i.e. that he is said to be a homosexual.¹⁴⁹

Da mit reit ich an minen gmach.
 eine rede man do da von mir sprach,
 diu was mir herzenlichen leit;
 man sprach: "diu küneginne hat verseit
 hern Hademar ir tyoste hie,
 daz tet si für war ritter nie;

¹⁴⁸Daly, 67.

¹⁴⁹The use of the term "homosexual" in this medieval context is, of course, anachronistic, because it did not come into existence until 1869, when it was coined by the Hungarian psychiatrist Benkert. Ulrich's own formulation "er minne die man" is a frequently used formula for male same-sex love in Middle High German texts, as for example also in Dietrich von der Glezze's *Der Gürtel*, analyzed later in this thesis, which features the almost identical formulation "er liebet die man." For a discussion of other Middle High German terms describing male homosexual relationships in literature, see also Hergemöller, 303-323. On the history of the term and concept of homosexuality, see Vern L. Bullough, *Homosexuality: A History* (New York and Scarborough, Ontario: New American Library, 1979).

ich waen, siz dar umbe hat getan,
 daz man des giht, er minne die man."

Frauendienst, stanza 878

[With that I rode to my lodgings. There was a rumour about me which I heartily regretted. It was said: the queen has refused Hademar combat here; something like that she has truly never done to a knight. I assume she did it because it is said that he loves men]

Becoming aware of these rumours, Ulrich develops a hatred of Hademar, the reason for which never becomes clear to the reader. Is it because Ulrich has just found out that an allegedly homosexual knight has dared to challenge him? Or is it rather Ulrich's embarrassment that the rumours have revealed the actual reason for his refusal to joust with Hademar, namely that he is supposed to be a homosexual? The strategy of distributing the information via rumours, which means without naming an actual speaker, may be interpreted as a reference to the status of homosexuality as "die stumme Sünde," i.e. the "unmentionable vice." The "vice" of homosexuality, although retrieved from silence by the rumours, is not connected to any identifiable speaker, and so remains in the "grey zone" between the spoken and the unspoken, or as Brigitte Spreitzer formulates it:

Es wird berichtet, daß etwas berichtet worden ist, was nun im Text in direkter Rede, aber ohne personale Bestimmung des Sprechers, noch einmal berichtet wird; der anonyme Sprecher bezieht seine vorsichtig als Vermutung ausgedrückte Aussage ("ich wæn") wiederum auf einen Bericht, der schon vorher im Umlauf war. [...] Niemand ist verantwortlich, aber das Gerücht

zirkuliert wie selbständig in der Maschinerie des Diskurses.¹⁵⁰

A connection between Ulrich and the suspected homosexual Hademar would put Ulrich's role as Lady Venus in a context which he at all costs wishes to avoid, and so it is not surprising that the unknighly cowardice that Hademar demonstrates during the following fight with Ulrich is meant to clearly distinguish a "real" man in a woman's dress from an effeminized, "wrong" man, a homosexual, in knight's armour. Stanza 892 relates how Hademar on the next day waits until Ulrich is exhausted from fighting before he sends a substitute (a "real" man fighting for him, the woman[ly man]) to kick him off his horse, since he himself seems to be too afraid to challenge Ulrich.

In all of the three described encounters, Ulrich's reaction is designed to ensure his audience of his inherent masculinity by contrasting it with what could be regarded as forms of "diminished" masculinity or even femininity. On a more general level, the encounters with Hademar and with the "windisch wip" show, as Carolyn Dussère points out, "that neither female combat nor suspected homosexuality [are] socially acceptable" and that Ulrich, despite his playful transgression of gender boundaries, is consciously "upholding the status quo while reassuring those members of the audience whose behavior falls safely within those limits."¹⁵¹ The fact that Ulrich and not his *Minnedame* eventually end their reversed-gender

¹⁵⁰Brigitte Spreitzer, *Die stumme Sünde: Homosexualität im Mittelalter: Mit einem Textanhang* (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1988), 89: "It is related that something has been said which now is being told once again in the text in direct speech but without specifying the speaker; the anonymous speaker refers in his statement, which is carefully expressed as an assumption, again to a report, which has already been in circulation. [...] Nobody is responsible, but the rumour circulates as if independently in the machinery of the discourse."

¹⁵¹Carolyn Dussère, "Humor and Chivalry in Ulrich von Lichtenstein's *Frauendienst* und Gerhard Hauptmann's *Ulrich von Lichtenstein*," *Colloquia Germanica* 16 (1983): 302.

relationship confirms the assumption that Ulrich, in spite of his seemingly inferior, feminine role in the relationship to his *Minnedame*, in reality at no point loses his male control over the action. In the world of Ulrich von Liechtenstein, traditional male dominance is never threatened, but it is on the basis of the established, and accepted, male-female power relationship that a playful breach of gender roles appears as a titillating, "perverse" game.

d) Dietrich von der Glezze: *Der Gürtel*

In Dietrich von der Glezze's *Der Gürtel*¹⁵² the reader is presented with a twofold transgression of gender boundaries. A young noblewoman, wife of a proud and splendid knight named Konrad, is left by her husband because she has had an erotic encounter with another knight in exchange for three gifts: a hawk, hounds and a magic belt. When her husband is informed about his wife's unfaithfulness, he decides not to return home, but to seek adventures in foreign countries. After having waited for a considerable time for her husband's return, the wife one day decides to dress up as a knight herself and to search for him. In the role of a certain Heinrich von Schwaben she finally meets her husband far away in foreign

¹⁵²Dietrich von Glaz, "Der Gürtel," in *Gesamtabenteuer*, ed. Friedrich Heinrich von der Hagen, vol. 1 (Stuttgart und Tübingen: J. G. Cotta'scher Verlag, 1850), 449-478. All quotations from *Der Gürtel* are from this edition.

lands, and, without revealing her identity, travels with him until they have become good friends. The easy friendship between Konrad and his cross-dressed wife "Heinrich" becomes problematic, when one day "Heinrich" reveals to Konrad that he/she has never in his life loved a woman but always been drawn to men. "Heinrich" then offers him the hawk and hounds, if he agrees to be loved by "Heinrich" in the same way as a man loves a woman, i.e. if he takes the passive role in an homosexual encounter:

her Heinrich sprach: "nû merket baz:

Dû muost dich nider zuo mir legen,

sô wil ich mir dir pflegen

Aller der minne,

ser ich von mînem sinne

gedenken und ertrahten kan,

darzuo swes ein ieglich man

Mit sîner vrouwen pfligt,

swenne er nahtes bî ir ligt."

Der Gürtel v. 754-62

[Heinrich said: "Now listen carefully: you have to lie down next to me and I will make all kinds of love to you, whatever comes to my mind and in addition to that whatever every man usually does with his wife when he lies with her at night."]

Konrad agrees, albeit reluctantly, because he desperately wants to own "Heinrich's" hawk and hounds, and following "Heinrich's" instructions Konrad lays himself "an den rükke" (v. 774),

i.e. on his back, in order to have the homosexual act performed on him. Only at that point does "Heinrich" reveal her/his true identity as Konrad's abandoned wife and the purpose of her/his unusual demand:

Durch habech und durch winde
 und durch das ros geswinde
 Und durch mînen borten guot,
 der mir gibet hôhen muot
 Ze strîten unt ze tschuste,
 einen ritter ich kuste
 und liez in bî mir slâfen,
 daz ir mit dem wâfen
 Wæret, mit des borten kraft,
 werder in der ritterschaft:
 Nû welt ir ein kezzer sîn
 vil gerne durch den habech mîn

Der Gürtel v. 781-92

[Because of the hawk and the hounds as well as the fast horse, and because of my valuable belt which gives me high spirits in struggle and in combat with the spear, I kissed a knight and let him sleep with me, so that you would become a better knight with the weapons and with the power of the belt. Now

*you willfully want to become a heretic just because of the hawk.]*¹⁵³

In order to demonstrate the self-righteousness underlying Konrad's attitude to her faithlessness, his wife proves to him that he would perform an even more outrageous act than mere adultery for much less reason than she had: while she refused the first two offered gifts of hawk and hounds, and agreed to grant the unknown knight her sexual favours only because of the magic belt (which she wanted primarily for her husband), her husband was willing to submit to an act of heresy for the hounds and the hawk alone. "Heinrich's" equation of homosexuality with heresy was a common, and dangerous, one in the Middle Ages:

Wenn auch eine detaillierte Quellenuntersuchung zum Problem der Homosexualität innerhalb der Ketzerverfolgungen noch aussteht, beweist allein der deutsche Sprachgebrauch, daß eine Verbindung beider Vorstellungsbereiche üblich war: 'Ketzerie' konnte sogar eine völlige Bedeutungsgleichheit mit dem Begriff 'Sodomie' im Sinne von homosexuellem Koitus und heterosexuellem Analverkehr eingehen ...¹⁵⁴

In the light of the persecution, torture, and cruel death that many medieval heretics suffered,

¹⁵³The medieval text is inconsistent in the number of presents offered to Konrad. While in the preliminary negotiations "Heinrich" offers only the hawk (v.734 and 752), Konrad agrees to the act in exchange for the hawk and hounds (v.769). Later, when Konrad's wife reveals her true identity and the reasons for her demand, she talks alternatively about hawk and hounds (v. 778) and the hawk alone (v. 792).

¹⁵⁴Spreitzer, 57: "Although a detailed examination of the sources to the problem of homosexuality in the persecution of heretics is in general still to be written, the conventions of the German language alone prove that a connection of the two notions was usual: 'heresy' could even become totally synonymous with the term 'sodomy' in the sense of homosexual coitus and heterosexual anal intercourse." On the connection between sodomy and heresy, see also Michael Goodich, "Sodomy in Medieval Secular Law," *Journal of Homosexuality* 1,3 (1976): 295-302.

the most "famous" among them being the Knights Templars, the accusation Konrad's wife makes reveals itself as a dangerous threat.¹⁵⁵

But what makes the story so striking is not only its detailed and, according to Spreitzer, unique description of a homosexual act in medieval German literature,¹⁵⁶ but also the fact that the reversal of gender roles here appears in a generally positive light. At one point the narrator even points out how becoming the short hair and male disguise are for Konrad's wife:

Als ich ez vernomen hân,
 dô diu vrouwe wolgetân
 Bereit wart, und ir hâr ab geschriet,
 Mit den knechten si dô schiet
 Von dem wirte in mannes wât:
 wê, wie wol ir daz stât!"

Der Gürtel v. 491-96

[As I have heard, when the pretty lady was ready and had her hair cut off, she left her host wearing male attire and taking her servants with her: oh, how becoming that was!]

That Konrad's wife seems to fit her masculine role well might also be deduced from her

¹⁵⁵ On the fate of the Templars see Vern L. Bullough, "Heresy, Witchcraft, and Sexuality," *Journal of Homosexuality* 1,2 (1974): 192.

¹⁵⁶Ibid., 95-96. See also Joachim Suchomski, "*Delectatio*" und "*Utilitas*:" *Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis mittelalterlicher deutscher Literatur* (Bern und München: Francke, 1975), 201-202, who even claims that there are no descriptions of "perversion" in the medieval *Schwank* at all.

unusual knightly prowess in combat, which makes her superior even to her husband. As in the *Nibelungenlied* and the *Frauen Turnei*, however, this kind of masculine "strength" in a woman is "neutralized" by its characterization as an external, non-innate feature, which is stimulated by a source outside of the woman's body, a source which in this story is not the devil, but the magic belt.

The punishment that Konrad's wife has invented for her husband places him not only in the position of woman, thereby reducing him to an outsider of male-dominated medieval society, but also in the position of a heretic, thus rendering him an outsider of medieval society as a whole. By posing as a man and pretending to have a penis with which to penetrate Konrad, his wife quite literally takes over the dominant male position in their relationship and successfully places Konrad in the position of the penetrated "wife." For this reason, I cannot agree with Heribert Hoven's rather condescending assertion that the position of the partners is merely an indicator of the wife's lack of knowledge about the phenomenon of "pederasty."¹⁵⁷ Nor does Hoven's general tendency to focus his, and the reader's, attention almost completely on the wife's misbehaviour, while at the same time exonerating the man, do justice to the text. On the contrary, the position indicates that Konrad's act of submission is, in spite of his wife's disguise as a man, ultimately expressed in heterosexual rather than in homosexual terms, a fact which pays tribute to the wife's, and the reader's, knowledge about "Heinrich's" actual gender. Only the position on the back, the woman's position in heterosexual intercourse, manages to place a man in the role of a woman and thus bring about

¹⁵⁷Heribert Hoven, *Studien zur Erotik in der deutschen Märendichtung* (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1978), 72.

a complete gender role reversal. Yet although the gender role reversal is expressed in terms of a sexual relationship and relies on the definitions of "man" and "woman," the text makes it clear that a man cannot ultimately become a woman, for once he abandons his masculine position he is doomed to sink even below the status of woman, deep into the realms of medieval "perversions," such as homosexuality and heresy. A man who attempts to become a woman only becomes something impossible, inconceivable.

The depiction of such a severely transgressive act is nevertheless only acceptable because of its inherent affirmative character. Similar to Hugdietrich's and Ulrich von Liechtenstein's already discussed gender transgressions, the role reversal described here is meant to ultimately re-affirm the traditional medieval world order. Husband and wife are reunited and the wife is released from her dangerously independent state of a wealthy young woman living without male "huote," symbolized by the opposition "inside" the garden vs. "outside," travelling the world. Moreover, after Konrad's humiliation, his wife interrupts the preparations for the homosexual act and counters his offer of submission ("vrouwe mîn, ich wil iuwer eigen sîn," v. 803-4) with her own retreating to the role of the subordinate partner in their relationship: "Ich wil ouch, herre, lernen / Allen dînen willen" (v. 807-8).¹⁵⁸ In contrast to the lady depicted in Thomasin's *Der welsche Gast*, Konrad's wife refrains from using, or abusing, her power over her husband and thus makes possible the authorial acceptance of her transgression of gender boundaries. Apart from that, the text successfully forecloses the possibility of a homosexual encounter by casting Konrad's wife in a role she is ultimately unable to fulfill: her lack of a penis renders impossible any attempt of penetration,

¹⁵⁸"My lady, I want to be yours." - "Lord, I also want to learn all your wishes."

a fact which not only she herself, but also the listener or reader is well aware of.¹⁵⁹ In this respect, the text, despite its socially unacceptable topic, is "playing safe": it allows the audience to engage in a dangerous and pleasurable thought-game which at the same time is portrayed as inherently impossible. Another striking medieval example of this kind of foreclosing possibilities occurs in *Die Mißverständliche Beichte* by Hans Folz, a *maere* which plays on ambivalent meanings of words and terms: a man in his confession admits to acts of sodomy and incest only to claim later that the priest has interpreted ambiguous terms incorrectly. By the same token *Der Gürtel* re-assures the male audience that Konrad's wife because of her lack of a penis is ultimately unable to inhabit the dominant male position in relationship to her husband. Thus the homosexual "encounter" fulfills a twofold purpose: it serves as a means of punishing Konrad, while at the same time ultimately restricting the power of his wife by emphasizing her inherent female lack, her lack of a penis with which to "punish."

Their subsequent life together is described as harmonious, and although it is not explicitly mentioned, the reader is led to assume that the traditional relationship between the genders is restored--at least on the surface. As Brigitte Spreitzer points out, the end of this *maere* is idealistic and cannot really obscure the fact that the double transgression of gender boundaries may have influenced not only the attitude of the protagonists themselves, but probably also the mind-set of the listeners or readers of the text by pointing to the possibility

¹⁵⁹I take my definition of "foreclosure" from Judith Butler, who claims that as "distinguished from repression understood as an action by an already-formed subject, foreclosure is an act of negation that founds and forms the subject itself." Judith Butler, "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification," in *Constructing Masculinity*, 36n.

of an alternative model of conjugal power-relations.¹⁶⁰ More difficult to comprehend, however, is William H. Jackson's astonishment that in *Der Gürtel*, *Die Heidin IV* and *Das Frauenturnier* the woman, although guilty of violating patriarchal laws, in the end lives in a happy marriage. In the case of *Der Gürtel*, Jackson's astonishment might be due to his selective reading of the *maere* as an example of a *woman's* failure alone, and his omission of the husband's violation of an even stronger social and sexual taboo:

Alle drei Erzählungen haben einen novellistischen Zuschnitt, spielen in der ritterlich-kriegerischen Welt, problematisieren die Rolle der Frau und stellen in den Mittelpunkt des Geschehens die Übertretung eines wichtigen Verbotes der patriarchalischen Gesellschaft durch die Frau--im 'Gürtel' und in der 'Heidin' begeht die Frau Ehebruch, im 'Frauenturnier' übertritt sie das Gebot der Wehrunfähigkeit der Frau, was ein beinahe ebenso bedenkliches Vergehen darstellt. Dennoch bleibt es auffallend, daß die Frau jedesmal am Ende eine glückliche Ehe führt, und in allen drei Gedichten scheint die Faszination für das Brechen eines Tabus durch die Frau eine mindestens ebenso starke Motivation zu sein wie die Herausarbeitung einer moralischen Lehre.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰Ibid., 97.

¹⁶¹Jackson, 134: "All three narratives have a novelistic character, are situated in the courtly-military world, problematize the role of the woman, and focus on the violation of an important prohibition of patriarchal society by the woman--in *Der Gürtel* and in *Die Heidin* the woman commits adultery, and in *Das Frauenturnier* she violates the prohibition to carry weapons, which constitutes an almost equally grave trespass. Nevertheless, it remains surprising that the woman in the end leads a happy married life, and in all three poems the fascination about the violation of a taboo by the woman seems to be a motivation as strong as the formulation of a moral lesson."

With regard to the role of the reader's (secret) fascination with breaking taboos, I agree with Jackson. I would claim, however, that in *Der Gürtel* the husband's violation of the law against the "unmentionable vice" provides a much greater source of fascination than the topic of adultery, which was relatively common in the literature of the Middle Ages. In the case of *Der Gürtel*, I would consider it astonishing not that the wife, but rather that the husband, after his severe violation of a sexual taboo, is in the end able, and permitted, to lead a happy marriage.

Excursus

As Jackson's interpretation of Dietrich von der Glezze's *Der Gürtel* suggests, the examination of reference works, literary histories and literary analyses dealing with a controversial work like this yields interesting insights into the treatment of the topic of homosexuality by literary critics. While older reference works most often ignore this *maere* (and short medieval prose texts in general)¹⁶² or are primarily concerned with the question of its possible sources, and

¹⁶²See, for example, literary histories such as the ones by Vilmar (1847, 1851, 1901), Gervinus (1853), Scherer (1886), Francke (1897), Bartel (1909, 1933), Biese (1913, 1930), Stock (1919), Vogt und Koch (1920), Salzer (1926), Nadler (1929), Wiegler (1930), Boesch (1946, 1961), Becker (1957), etc. R. Brendel in his dissertation *Über das MHD. Gedicht 'Der Borte' von Dietrich von der Glezze* (Halle a. D. S.: Ehrhardt Karras, 1906) manages to

their remarks on the homosexuality episode refer mostly to the assumed Greek source "Kephalos and Prokris" by Antonius Liberalis, *Metamorphosen* cap. 41,¹⁶³ others show a tendency to either obscure the episode in general or to suppress specific elements of it. The most extreme example of this is offered by Gustav Ehrismann, who in his *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur* (1934) relates the homosexual encounter in the following words:

Als Mann verkleidet zieht darauf die Frau auf Turniere aus und besiegt ihren eigenen, sie nicht erkennenden Gatten; beide machen als Freunde gemeinsame Heerfahrten und endlich gibt sie sich ihm zu erkennen, gerade als er im Heidenland einen Fehltritt begehn will, von dem sie ihn abhält.¹⁶⁴

In Ehrismann's account the events of the tale are totally obscured, if not actually falsified. Not only does it remain unclear what kind of lapse Konrad is about to make, but his wife's role as the initiator of the whole situation is suppressed as well. Moreover, the syntactic connection between the undefined moral lapse and the sphere of the non-Christian "Other" ("Fehltritt" and "im Heidenland"), seems to suggest an inherent connection between the nature of the lapse and the perpetrator's position outside of the realm of Christianity. Although Konrad is not excused, his lonely position away from home in a strange country guarantees him

analyse this *maere* on 78 pages without mentioning its content in so much as a single line.

¹⁶³See for example F. Liebrecht in *Germania* 1 (1856): 261; R. Köhler in *Germania* 31 (1886): 49-50; and O.R. Meyer in *ZfdA* 59 (1922): 36-46.

¹⁶⁴Gustav Ehrismann, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur bis zum Ausgang des Mittelalters*, vol. 2 (München: C. H. Beck, 1934), 120: "Disguised as a man, the woman goes to tournaments and conquers her own husband, who does not recognize her. As friends, both participate in military campaigns, and finally she reveals her identity--just at the moment when she prevents him from making a slip in the heathen country."

diminished accountability for a possible transgression. At the same time, the transgressive act itself is assigned to the realm outside of Christianity, and the latter kept "pure."

Helmut de Boor in his *Die deutsche Literatur im Mittelalter* (1962) does mention the episode, but omits details, such as the distribution of the active/passive roles, and leaves it to the reader's imagination to figure out what kind of "widernatürliches Gelüste" [perverted desire] she (!), i.e. his wife, would like to satisfy with Konrad.¹⁶⁵

Karl Goedecke in his *Grundriß zur Geschichte der deutschen Literatur* (1884) relates the homosexual encounter between Konrad and his disguised wife as such, but reverses the active/passive roles of the two partners:

Dem Herzog schlägt sie das Begehren ab, ihrem Manne aber verheißt sie das Gewünschte, wenn er ihr thun wolle, was man den Weibern thue [...]. Als er nachts ihr Begehren erfüllen will...¹⁶⁶

By depicting Konrad as the active "masculine" part in the planned homosexual scenario and allotting the passive, "feminine" part to his disguised wife, Goedecke not only softens the impact of Konrad's transgression in the eyes of the reader (who is aware that "Heinrich" is in reality a woman), but leaves the traditional medieval male-female power relationship intact. It is almost touching how Goedecke attempts to "normalize" the already "heterosexualized" homosexual encounter further by letting it take place in the night, whereas the text gives no

¹⁶⁵Helmut de Boor, *Die deutsche Literatur im späten Mittelalter: Zerfall und Neubeginn*, vol. 1: 1250-1350 (München: Beck, 1962), 277.

¹⁶⁶Karl Goedecke, *Grundriß zur Geschichte der deutschen Dichtung* (Dresden: Verlag L.S. Ehlermann, 1884?), 225: "She rejects the duke's desire but grants her husband his wishes, if he wanted to do to her what one does with women [...]. At night when he wants to fulfil her desire..."

information about the time of day and lets the preparation for the intercourse follow the conversation immediately, even stressing the fact that "Heinrich" wishes to fulfill his desire without delay at the place of their conversation "uf eine warte," out of doors (v. 709 and v. 772).

Hans-Friedrich Rosenfeld in the *Verfasserlexikon* does not use the term "homosexuality," and instead claims that Konrad is willing to succumb to an act of "Päderastie" [pederasty] without providing any further details.¹⁶⁷ The term "pederasty," which also appears in Hoven's study, does not necessarily have to be understood in its modern meaning. Nor does the authors' use of this term necessarily indicate their unfamiliarity with the finer distinctions between the various homosexual practices. As Brundage and Bullough have observed, especially earlier medievalists often felt uncomfortable dealing with issues of sexuality in medieval literature. Consequently, these matters were either "abruptly passed over as the instructors or writers hastened with burning blushes to apply themselves to more neutral topics," or, alternatively, these medievalists "distanced themselves from the subject with moralistic reflections upon the flawed nature of humankind in this wicked world."¹⁶⁸ It is quite possible that Rosenfeld and Hoven used the term "pederasty" in a similar way as Leopold von Ranke does in his study on the decline of

¹⁶⁷Hans-Friedrich Rosenfeld, "Dietrich von der Glesse (Glezze)," in *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*, ed. Kurt Ruh et al., vol. 2 (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1980), 138.

¹⁶⁸Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage, introduction to *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (New York and London: Garland, 1996), x.

fifteenth-century Italy, namely as a "catch-all term for everything that [they] disliked."¹⁶⁹

This short overview demonstrates that Dietrich von der Glezze's discussion of the homosexual act was able to provoke surprising reactions among the literary historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They often did not hesitate to use their power as mediators between medieval text and modern audience in order to "clean up" and thereby censor the content of the *maere*. The agenda behind their alterations seems to be uniform, namely to save the reputation of the male protagonist, at the cost not only of the "truth" of the *maere*, but sometimes also of the image of its female protagonist. It may be assumed that the critics at the same time tried to protect their own reputation as literary scholars dedicated to preserving "their" cultural heritage. Neither their own person nor the sanctity of the literary work should be "sullied" by what they perceived as portrayals of "perversion."

e) *Beringer*

Like Heinrich von der Glezze's *Der Gürtel*, the anonymous *maere* entitled *Beringer*¹⁷⁰ offers the reader a reversal of gender roles which ultimately, though not as completely, aims at the restoration of traditional medieval gender arrangements. The knight Beringer, the main

¹⁶⁹Ibid.

¹⁷⁰"Beringer," in *Maeren-Dichtung*, ed. Thomas Cramer, vol. 1 (München: Wilhelm Finck Verlag, 1979), 71-81. All quotations from *Beringer* are taken from this edition.

character in the story, abuses his patriarchal position as master of his household by tyrannizing those entrusted to him, his meanness and unfriendliness sharply contrasting with his wife's beauty and virtue. His abuse of power inside his home is matched only by his "unmanliness" outside, in combat. At tournaments he manages to avoid all fights so successfully that his wife becomes suspicious because of her husband's undamaged armour. Recalling the state in which her father, the male role model in this story, used to return from tournaments, she wishes to find out more about her husband's adventures and one day follows him secretly, disguised in knight's armour. Her husband, whom she meets far from the place of tournament deeply absorbed in maltreating his armour with his sword, does not recognize her, but mistakes her for an unknown knight. The reason for Beringer's wife's decision not to wear any pants under her armour becomes clear when she executes the specific form of punishment she has thought out for her husband:

die frau mit vnzuchten
 stach in hinden vff den nack,
 dz er viel nider als ein sack
 vnd nit enwißt, wa er wz.
 von irem ros sy sich ließ,
 gar vngefiog sy in sties
 mit den hentschuhen vff die nasz,
 dz er betroffen den grunen wassen
 vnd weder hort noch gsach.

[...]

"so kussent mich fur min arszloch
 dry stund vnd nennet uwern namen,
 so sind wir versunet beide samen."

Beringer, v. 188-191

[The woman violently pricked him in his neck so that he fell down like a sack and did not know any more where he was. She let herself down on the grass beside him; she dismounted from her horse and violently beat him with her gloves on the nose so that he made the green grass wet and did not hear or see. [...] "So kiss my asshole three times and say your name, so we shall be reconciled."]

Through her vicious beating, Beringer's wife "makes" her husband the battle-wounded knight he always pretended to be; she literally inscribes the signs of knighthood on his body, and at the same time takes revenge for his cruelty towards herself and her household.¹⁷¹ The subsequent three kisses on her naked behind allude to and ironize the traditional medieval custom of the kiss of reconciliation which is to be found in many Middle High German works.¹⁷² In the same way as the idea of the knightly tournament is undermined by Beringer's conjugal (and gender) struggle with his wife, the kiss as a symbol of reconciliation and a key element of male bonding is transformed into a symbol of humiliation. Possible (homo)erotic

¹⁷¹On the body as the site of punishment and (re-)initiation in some MHG *maeren*, see Mark Chinca, "The Body in Some Middle High German Mären: Taming and Maiming," in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 1994), 187-210, who, however, does not examine *Beringer*.

¹⁷²See especially George Fenwick Jones, "The Kiss in Middle High German Literature," *Studia Neophilologica: A Journal of Germanic and Romance Philology* 38 (1966): 195-210.

elements, if they are present, remain beneath the surface of shame and revulsion on the part of Beringer ("er sprach: 'pfu mich, boser man,/ mich ruwet, dz ich ie ritter ward'" [He said, "Ugh, shame on myself, bad man / I regret that I ever became a knight," v. 202-3]) and amusement on the part of Beringer's wife, who has to terminate the punishment after the second kiss because she can hardly suppress her laughter (v. 204-8).¹⁷³

However, the process of the subversion of the institution of medieval knighthood goes even deeper in this poem. When the defeated Beringer asks the victorious knight his name, he receives the following answer:

er sprach: "ich bin von boszland
und heisz ritter wienant
mit der langen ars krynnen
und bin zu harburg inne."

Beringer, v. 221-224

[He said "*I am from Badland and I am called knight Wienant the Long Assed and live in Harburg.*"]

The figure of the knight "Wienant" undermines the picture of the heroic knight through the obscenity of his name, which, nevertheless, reflects the most outstanding characteristic he possesses in the eyes, and in the memory, of the defeated Beringer.

When Beringer arrives home, his seemingly obedient wife welcomes him in her best

¹⁷³It is possible, although the text gives no explicit indication, that the three kisses on the naked behind are influenced by the heretic custom of the "obscene kiss," to which members of some medieval heretic sects confessed. See Michael Goodich, *The Unmentionable Vice: Homosexuality in the Later Medieval Period* (Santa Barbara, California and Oxford, England: ABC-Clio, 1979), 9.

dress, and for a while Beringer acts as a loving and peaceful husband. Nevertheless, when one day during a discussion with his wife Beringer gets angry and again starts to become violent, she for the first time is able to counter his violence by threatening him with her friend, the knight Wienant--a strategy which proves immensely successful. Beringer is so horrified by the prospect of another encounter with the infamous knight that he offers his unconditional surrender if his wife refrains from informing Wienant about his behaviour:

vnd sprach: "zarte frau min,
 thund uwer tugend an mir schin!
 ob ich ie wider uch getet,
 so lond mich buß und bette
 vnd besserung lyden
 vnd nymmer tag vermyden,
 wz ir gebietet, dz sy schlecht.
 Furbas wen uwer eigen knecht
 wil ich in uwern hulden leben.
 geruchet mir uwer huld geben
 vnd saget es dem ritter nicht,
 dem man die langen ars krynnen gicht."

Beringer, v. 383-394.

[And said: "My tender lady, demonstrate your virtue on me. If I ever acted against you, let me suffer penance and penitence and promise improvement and leave out no single day: what you wish shall be fair and good. From now

on, like your servant I want to live according to your will, if you deign to be kindly disposed towards me and do not speak of this to the knight who is called the long-arsed one]

Although the story shows the wife victorious in the battle between the genders, the underlying notions on gender and power-relations are not really challenged. Beringer's wife is able to fight and defeat her husband not as a woman, but only in the disguise of a male, as the knight Wienant. Thus, the transgression of gender boundaries is obscured; and although the reader is aware of Wienant's "actual" gender (which is re-enforced by the consistent use of the feminine pronoun "sy" in the text)¹⁷⁴ the impact of her transgression is softened. Since a woman because of her gender is not allowed to have power over a man, the text "transforms" her into a man in order to make it possible for her to fulfil the role assigned to her in the story. Yet not only Beringer's wife acts as a transvestite; also Beringer himself seems to act the "wrong" gender in this story. Although he does not actually cross-dress, he in some way "cross-behaves." His "unmanliness" in fight demonstrates his inability to attain the standards of masculinity prescribed for a medieval knight, a weakness which is highlighted by his cruelty at home, i.e. in the realm of his wife. In contrast to the text's French source, Garin's *De Berangier au lon cul*,¹⁷⁵ where Beringer's "unmanliness" is explained by his social status (he is a merchant who has received the daughter of a nobleman for his wife as a payment for the merchant's debts), the German *maere* gives no explicit reason for Beringer's lack of

¹⁷⁴There is only one exception to this (in line 221) where the author is presumably deceived by his own deception and uses the personal pronoun "er."

¹⁷⁵Garin, "De Berangier au lon cul," in *Fabliaux: Französische Schwankerzählungen des Hochmittelalters*, trans. Albert Gier (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1985), 198-215.

"manliness." Thus the struggle between Beringer and his wife is universalized as a struggle between the genders, independent of other factors such as social status, a feature typical of the German *maere*.¹⁷⁶ And though one might assume that a husband's cruelty to his wife is not in itself regarded as wrong, it seems misplaced if committed by a man who acts in such a cowardly fashion when confronted with other men. Beringer's cowardice finds its grotesque reflection in his cruelty. Since he is not able to "fill out" his knightly armour, the armour degenerates into a prop. Beringer's armour thus does not differ from the props his wife uses for her impersonation of the knight Wienant.

As in Dietrich von der Glezze's *Der Gürtel*, Beringer's wife does not "abuse" her power over her husband (symbolized by her unwillingness to demand undue services from him, such as a voyage overseas, v. 418-423). Nevertheless, the relationship seems to remain "unequal" in her favour. From this the reader might draw the conclusion that a wife's, moderate, reign might be preferable to that of her husband, if the husband proves unable to fulfil his role. However, Beringer's wife is only able to leave her designated area and challenge her husband on equal terms in the guise of a man. This and the fact that Beringer accepts his wife's later dominion only because of her alleged back-up by the knight Wienant, assures the reader that ultimately a man can only be challenged and beaten into submission by

¹⁷⁶See Walter Blank, "Zur Paarbeziehung in deutscher Märendichtung: Sozialer Kontext und Bedingungen," in *The Making of the Couple: The Social Function of Short-Form Medieval Narrative*, ed. Michel Olsen (Odense: Odense UP, 1991), 70: Daraus ergibt sich die Folgerung, daß wir bezüglich des Rollenverhaltens der Geschlechter eine weitgehende Identität feststellen [...] Das Problem der Paar-Struktur wird daher als ständeübergreifendes, allgemein anthropologisches empfunden." [From this it can be concluded that there is an identity in the gender role behaviour displayed by the different social classes [...] The problem of the structure of the couple is obviously regarded as socially universal, generally anthropological.]

"his equal," i.e. by another man, or by someone whom he perceives and accepts as a man. What might, nevertheless, disturb the reader's peace of mind is the realization that it sometimes only takes some "props" to make a woman a man's equal, or to put it differently, that a woman's possible equality to a man is socially suppressed by her being refused the appropriate male "props" and the connected privileges. At the same time, the story of *Beringer* teaches the reader that a man's "natural" superiority is often only upheld by the same male "props" as are withheld from the female half of humanity.

4. Conclusions

The above examined texts constitute only a small segment of medieval German literature. Nevertheless, they provide an impression of the rich and diverse medieval literary discourse on gender and the power relations between the genders. Although, due to the different genres discussed, it is not feasible to compare the selected texts very closely, I would nevertheless like to formulate some general observations. Transgressive acts are always depicted as rare exceptions, the reasons for which are usually given, at least speculatively. Sebastian Brant's *Narrenschiff* regards the effeminization of young men mainly as a result of foreign influences, represented by the new fashions. Thomasin's *Der welsche Gast* gives *unstaete* as the reason, referring especially to the subcategory of lecherousness. Lecherousness is regarded as responsible for weakening a man's superior position of power and for a possible

reversal of gender roles. Although Sebastian Brant and Thomasin von Zerclaere employ different "didactic" strategies in order to identify, punish and correct what they as self-acclaimed guardians of the societal norms of their time feel are violations of these norms, both base their critiques on the assumption that the decried transgressions constitute only a temporary aberration from a universally accepted, timeless standard, a "sickness" which can ultimately be "cured." As moral teachers, both Sebastian Brant and Thomasin von Zerclaere not only re-enforce existing norms, but at the same time participate in and shape the cultural discourse of their time.

As already pointed out in the introduction, the five fictional texts employ more indirect methods of dealing with violations of gender norms. Here a distinction proves useful between the three epic/courtly romances *Nibelungenlied*, *Wolfdietrich B* and Ulrich von Liechtenstein's *Frauendienst*, on the one hand, and the two *maeren*, Dietrich von der Glezze's *Der Gürtel* and the anonymous *Beringer*, on the other hand. *Maeren*, as texts which more often than not draw their attraction from the depiction of a world upside down, are often much more "daring" in their portrayal of violations of normative masculine and feminine behaviour than other literary genres. Yet, as I have tried to demonstrate, these violations clearly have their limits. One boundary between mentionable and unmentionable "vices" is that between what in modern terms would be heterosexual and homosexual acts. Not only the fact that the homosexual act negotiated in Dietrich von der Glezze's *Der Gürtel* is foreclosed from the start because of the wife's lack of a penis, but also the uniqueness of the discussion of homosexuality at all, even in the genre of the *maere*, shows limitations put upon the literature of the time. Not only does the text provide a reason for the wife's "strategy," but it

uses Konrad's "reduction" to the passive, "feminine," part in the supposed homosexual encounter as a negative *exemplum*, warning against violations of gender roles. The reactions of the male literary critics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to this exceptional discussion of homosexuality confirm the view about the limits of the representable in the medieval *maere*. The critics seem to adhere to the same categories of mentionable and unmentionable topics as the medieval texts they study.

Within the boundaries of heterosexuality, on the other hand, there seem to be virtually no restrictions as to what is permitted and depictable in the *maere*. The anonymous *maere Beringer*, with its ritualistic kissing of the anus, does not seem to have evoked nearly as much uneasiness as *Der Gürtel*. Although it is certainly possible to see homoerotic connotations in this scene, they are not explicitly remarked on in the text itself. Moreover, the repulsive and denigrating nature of the act might be regarded as an indirect comment on possible homosexual subtexts. Although neither of the two examined *maeren* ultimately manages to fully re-establish the traditional male-female power relationship, both provide a plausible reason for the transgressive act. Moreover, the genre of the *maere* itself offers a framework in which transgressive acts are safely contained. William Jackson's comment on the *Frauenturnier* might be seen as representative for the whole genre:

Auf dieser Ebene bietet das "Frauenturnier" exemplarisches Erzählen, denn es geht um das richtige Verhalten der Menschen, um das, was sich ziemt [...], und das Turnier der Frauen ist ein Stück verkehrter Welt [...], das der satirischen Absicht dient, die gewohnte Ordnung durch Darstellung ihrer

Verdrehung zu untermauern.¹⁷⁷

If we accept this definition, even the slight power-difference in favour of the female protagonist in both *Der Gürtel* and *Beringer* would ultimately be nullified by the power of the genre, which may permit the woman to inhabit the ultimate position "on top," and yet does not challenge medieval societal gender arrangements.

Likewise, the three courtly/epic romances attempt to single out the transgressions of gender boundaries and the reversal of the relationship of power between the genders as the result of a special situation, even an emergency situation. In the *Nibelungenlied*, the fraudulent wooing games provide ample explanation for the power-differential between Brünhild and Gunther. Hugdietrich, on the other hand, deliberately reduces himself to the status of a woman for the common reason of gaining access to an otherwise inaccessible woman. Ulrich von Liechtenstein's crossdressing is as deliberate as Hugdietrich's, yet with the difference that Wolfdietrich attempts to "pass" (if not in the eyes of the reader or listener), while Ulrich never takes the risk of being mistaken for a "real" woman. Ulrich's role as "Lady Venus" is planned and announced as a "role" from the start. Particularly the encounter with the "windish wip," a transvestite that Ulrich (like his audience in and outside of the text) looks *at* instead of *through*, and consequently mistakes for a "real" woman, leaves no doubt that there is no "revolutionary" potential in Ulrich's crossdressing. The three courtly/epic romances are much more sober in their dealing with unconventional masculine and feminine

¹⁷⁷Jackson, 125: "On this level the *Frauenturnier* offers exemplary story telling, because the topic is man's right behaviour, i.e. what is appropriate [...], and the ladies' tournament is a bit of the topsy-turvy world [...] which is used for the satirical purpose of supporting the normal order through the depiction of its reversal."

behaviour than the *maeren*, and on the textual level all three neither criticize nor challenge the traditional medieval gender arrangements.

What none of the eight texts can account for, however, is the "surplus" information which is transmitted mostly on a subtextual level, and which might leave the reader with a general feeling of uneasiness. I would claim that, despite the overtly affirmative character of all of the examined texts, none of them ultimately manages to fully "control" the transgressive acts they conjure up. Nor can they control the possibilities that these conjectures may suggest to the audience. Although all of the texts somehow manage to achieve a more or less conformist resolution to the "special" situation represented, or leave no doubt as to the societal and moral evaluation of the depicted violations of societal gender norms, the mere evocation of possible transgressive acts and the author's and the reader's conscious or subconscious interest in them may render the stories more, and unintentionally, pleasurable than they were probably intended to be.

PART TWO: MALE BONDING AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN

"What, would you like to marry your sister? What is the matter with you? Don't you want a brother-in-law? Don't you realize that if you marry another man's sister and another man marries your sister, you will have at least two brothers-in-law, while if you marry your own sister you will have none? With whom will you hunt, will whom will you garden, with whom will you visit?"

Arapesh¹

1. From Lévi-Strauss to Sedgwick: Male Homosocial Bonding and the Exchange of Women

Claude Lévi-Strauss in his anthropological work *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949) developed a concept of kinship that was based on the exchange of gifts, claiming that woman was the "most precious category"² of goods involved in this process:

... a continuous transition exists from war to exchange, from exchange to intermarriage, and the exchange of brides is merely the conclusion to an uninterrupted process of reciprocal gifts, which effects the transition from hostility to alliance, from anxiety to confidence, and from fear to friendship.³

According to Lévi-Strauss, this law of exchange also provides the basis for the almost

¹Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, trans. J. H. Bell et al. (1949; reprint: London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1969), 485.

²*Ibid.*, 61.

³*Ibid.*, 67-68.

universally encountered prohibition of incest, which he interprets as "less a rule prohibiting marriage with the mother, sister or daughter, than a rule obliging the mother, sister or daughter to be given to others. It is the supreme rule of the gift"⁴:

Like exogamy, which is its widened social application, the prohibition of incest is a rule of reciprocity. The woman one does not take, and whom one may not take, is, for that very reason, offered up. To whom is she offered? Sometimes to a group defined by institutions, and sometimes to an indeterminate and ever-open collectivity limited only by the exclusion of near relatives, such as in our own society.⁵

A quarter of a century after Lévi-Strauss, Gayle Rubin offered a feminist critique of his theory of kinship systems, and pointed to the fact that "if it is women who are being transacted, then it is the men who give and take them who are linked, the woman being a conduit of a relationship rather than a partner to it."⁶ Although Rubin acknowledges that "the exchange of women does not necessarily imply that women are objectified, in the modern sense,"⁷ she nevertheless makes a clear distinction between the woman's role as gift and the man's role as giver: "To enter into a gift exchange as a partner, one must have something to

⁴Ibid., 481.

⁵Ibid., 51.

⁶Rubin, 174.

⁷Ibid.

give. If women are for men to dispose of, they are in no position to give themselves away."⁸
 In this context, Rubin also uses the distinction between sex and gender when claiming that
 "at the most general level, the social organization of sex rests upon gender, obligatory
 heterosexuality, and the constraint of female sexuality."⁹

Eve Sedgwick¹⁰ draws on Lévi-Strauss and Rubin, but she shifts the emphasis of her
 interpretation, and concentrates on what she defines as the "homosocial" nature of male
 kinship systems in Western societies:

"Homosocial" is a word occasionally used in history and the social sciences,
 where it describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a
 neologism, obviously formed by analogy with "homosexual," and just as
 obviously meant to be distinguished from "homosexual."¹¹

Simon Gaunt, who uses Sedgwick's concept of male homosocial bonding in his analysis of
 gender and sexuality in the *Roman d'Enéas*, emphasizes the importance of Sedgwick's
 distinction between the homosocial and the homosexual:

The beauty of Sedgwick's analysis lies in the distinction she makes between
 the homosocial and the homosexual: the homosocial refers to any male/male

⁸Ibid., 175. The fact that, as Rubin puts it, "women do not have full rights to themselves" becomes most obvious in the modern debate about a woman's right to abortion, i.e. the right to decide over the use of her own body, against the anti-abortionists' claim to (the fruit of) women's bodies.

⁹Ibid., 179.

¹⁰Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia UP, 1985).

¹¹Ibid., 1.

bonding and may therefore be nonsexual; the homosexual to sexual relations between men."¹²

Although Sedgwick proposes a potential continuum between the "homosocial" and the "homosexual" spheres, she regards this continuum as radically disrupted for men in our Western society, where male bonding may be "characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality."¹³ Because of the potentially fluid boundaries between the homosocial and the homosexual, "every male is going to be careful to regulate his bonds with other men if he is concerned they may be perceived as homosexual (and therefore transgressional)."¹⁴ For this reason, it is hardly surprising to find that homophobia, which Sedgwick calls "a mechanism for regulating the behavior of the many by the specific oppression of the few,"¹⁵ is especially rampant in traditionally male institutions, such as "the army, the navy, public schools, Oxbridge colleges and so on, which surely produce infinitely more homophobes than homosexuals."¹⁶

Sedgwick's approach seems to be immensely fruitful not only for the analysis of the literature of the last two centuries but, as for example Gaunt's article shows, also for earlier periods. To give an example, in medieval societies the basic structures of exchange were still

¹²Simon Gaunt, "From Epic to Romance: Gender and Sexuality in the *Roman d'Enéas*," *Romantic Review* 83 (1992): 21.

¹³Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 1.

¹⁴Gaunt, 23.

¹⁵Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 88.

¹⁶Gaunt, 23.

more overt than they are in modern times, and especially so before the emergence of the concept of courtly love in the twelfth century. Apart from that, medieval literature may sometimes show a less perfectly disrupted continuum between homosocial and homosexual male bonds, or, in other words, may depict male-male relationships which seem to reach into the homoerotic sphere in the judgment of the modern reader without being explicitly acknowledged as homosexual by the text itself. In other cases, the continuum between homosocial and homosexual relationships may constitute a subtext to the story, while at the same time being foreclosed on the main textual level. Although the male bonds examined in this chapter are without exception defined as bonds of friendship or kinship, and are usually based on the heterosexual traffic in women, the term "homosocial" is useful in order to highlight possible points of transgression into the sphere of the homosexual.

Middle High German literature offers numerous examples of the connection between male bonding and traffic in women. Especially the institution of medieval marriage provided a useful instrument for creating relationships between men through the exchange of women, or, as George Duby formulates it:

Through marriage, societies try to maintain and perpetuate their own structures, seen in terms of a set of symbols and of the image they have of their own ideal perfection. The rites of marriage are instituted to ensure an orderly distribution of the women among the men; to regulate competition between males for females; to "officialize" and socialize procreation.¹⁷

¹⁷Georges Duby, *The Knight, the Lady and the Priest: The Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York: Random House, 1983), 18.

Although the Roman law on marriage, introduced in the thirteenth century in Germany, theoretically demanded the woman's consent, at least another two centuries were needed for this law to be actually enforced.¹⁸ And even then

the standard set scarcely maximized free choice. It did nothing to liberate a son or daughter from psychological and social pressure. It did not disturb the prevailing pattern of parentally arranged marriages. [...] As long as the age of marriage coincided with puberty, the parents could not be removed from their dominant position. The canons set only an outer boundary to the force that could be used to maintain that dominance.¹⁹

Women's special role, and their sometimes cruel fate, as "peace-weavers" between competing medieval dynasties becomes obvious in the example of the Germanic kingdoms in the sixth, seventh and eighth centuries:

In the world where Lombards fought Gepids and Franks, Northumbrians fought Mercians and Welsh, Mercians fought West Saxons and East Angles, and Merovingians fought everyone, including each other, women were given and taken, sometimes forcibly, as hostages and sealers of peace.²⁰

That women by the same token can also function as destroyers of peace is already

¹⁸Walter Blank, "Zur Paarbeziehung in deutscher Märendichtung: Sozialer Kontext und Bedingungen," in *The Making of the Couple: The Social Function of Short-Form Medieval Narrative*, ed. Flemming G. Andersen and Morten Nøjgaard (Odense: Odense UP, 1991), 84.

¹⁹John T. Noonan, "Marriage in the Middle Ages 1: Power to Choose," *Viator* 4 (1973): 433.

²⁰Pauline Stafford, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers: The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages* (Athens, Georgia: The U of Georgia Press, 1983), 44.

implied in the above quotation. To take a woman forcibly away from her family violates an existing male bond as easily as a woman given as a present creates a new one. In the Middle High German didactic poem *Tirol und Fridebrant*,²¹ King Tirol of Scotland explicitly warns his son Fridebrant against the dangers of transgression into another man's "sexual territory,"²² even if this man is his legal inferior:

Sun, dîner werden manne wîp
 und ir schoenen tohter lîp:
 nû hûete, daz dir iht under brust
 in dîn herze kom der glust,
 dâ mit dû dînen werden man
 an êren mûgest gewachen.
 niht baz ich dir gerâten kan.

Wan êst alles leides gar ein mort
 und wundet beide hie und dort:
 dir tragent zwei geslehte haz.

Tirol und Fridebrant, stanza 32-33

[*Son, be careful that you do not kindle in your breast a desire for your worthy retainers' wives and their beautiful daughters. With that you would diminish*

²¹*Winsbeckische Gedichte nebst Tirol und Fridebrant*, ed. Albert Leitzmann, 3rd ed. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1962).

²²Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 36-37.

your worthy retainers' honour. I cannot give you better advice. Because you would provoke great suffering here as well as there, and two families would hate you.]

Here, the father advises his son to restrict his own power and not to endanger or even sacrifice male homosocial bonding for the satisfaction of sexual desire, which is so dangerously and temptingly easy to obtain for the highest ranking nobleman in a kingdom. At the same time, the passing on of patriarchal knowledge and experience from father to son illustrates how male homosocial bonds operate between the generations, too. The woman's role as mother of sons accounts for the second duty, and source of the possible failure, of a medieval wife, namely procreation:

For the knights as for the priests, the purpose of marriage was procreation. The wife was led in procession to the house in order to produce legitimate heirs there. For this reason she was welcomed, absorbed into the household together with her expected offspring.²³

The fate of a woman who was regarded as barren could not even be influenced by the efforts of the medieval Christian Church. As Claudia Opitz points out, "it was still not unusual in the thirteenth century for wives to be repudiated if, after several years, they had not given birth."²⁴ Yet to be bound in marriage to a barren wife did not present the greatest danger to the survival of the male line in an age when wives could be disposed of relatively easily, even in cases when the wife's fertility was not questioned, but when a more distinguished marriage

²³Duby, *The Knight*, 44.

²⁴Opitz, 285.

was in reach. As Duby claims,

the worst danger of all was that a wife might be made pregnant by a man other than her husband, and children of a blood different from that of the master of the house might one day bear the name of his ancestors and succeed to their inheritance.²⁵

Medieval societies' severe restrictions on a woman's spiritual as well as physical freedom might be regarded as an expression of the male fear of being "cuckolded," and of finding the "nest" desecrated by a "cuckoo," a bastard, who usurps the position his blood gives him no right to hold.

As can be seen in *Tirol and Fridebrant*, male homosocial bonding, and its mechanisms, dangers and pleasures, have their place in medieval German literature. The following critical analysis of selected didactic and fictional works demonstrates the various ways in which the phenomenon of male homosocial bonding is reflected in different types of Middle High German texts.

²⁵Duby, *The Knight*, 47.

2. Male Homosocial Bonding in Medieval German Literature

2.1. Didactic literature

a) *Der Große Seelentrost*

The Middle Low German devotional book *Der Große Seelentrost*,²⁶ compiled in the second half of the fourteenth century in the local dialects of the Northwestern part of Germany and the Netherlands, was widely read not only in the later Middle Ages, but well into early modern times. The work's popularity is in part explained by its numerous *exempla*, which make it an *Exempelbuch* rather than a traditional catechetical work.²⁷ The reason for the text's position between two literary genres becomes obvious in the prologue, where the anonymous author or compiler complains about the growing interest in secular literature, which he regards as worthless in a spiritual sense. A few lines further on he declares his intention of counteracting this tendency with a devotional work which he names "der selen trost." The greater "lure" of secular books as compared to their religious counterparts accounts for the large number of *exempla* in *Der Große Seelentrost*, which increased the work's attractiveness

²⁶*Der Grosse Seelentrost: Ein niederdeutsches Erbauungsbuch des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts*, ed. Margarete Schmitt (Köln, Graz: Böhlau Verlag, 1959). All quotations from the *Seelentrost* are taken from this edition. On pages 9* -10* Schmitt offers an overview of the criticism up to the year 1955. Since then only a few more scholarly articles have appeared, most of which deal with questions of manuscripts and possible sources. (The asterisk indicates that the page number refers to the introduction to Schmitt's edition).

²⁷*Ibid.*, 137*.

and "digestibility" by combining entertainment and religious instruction, based on the well-known principle of *delectare et prodesse*.

The Biblical Ten Commandments supply the basic structure for *Der Große Seelentrost*.²⁸ Each commandment is introduced by a short formula in which a spiritual child asks its spiritual father to explain the nature of this specific commandment, to which the latter responds with the help of a selection of *exempla*. The individual *exemplum* often ends on a short *moralisatio* which re-enforces the connection between story and frame and sometimes also functions as a transition to the following *exemplum*.

As Margarete Schmitt has already pointed out, the relationship between *exemplum* and its didactic purpose is not always clear.²⁹ Especially when the author draws on already existing sources, such as legends or historical accounts, the reader might detect tensions or even actual contradictions between the content of the *exemplum* and its intended didactic purpose. One instance of this is the story of Solomon, which appears in the context of the Sixth Commandment and is used to support the injunction against lecherousness, but which at the same time describes Solomon's wealth of money, women etc. with so much admiration that this might well irritate the listener or reader. In a similar way, the story of "Amicus and Amelius," which appears in the context of the Eighth Commandment (against bearing false witness), yields some surprises for its unsuspecting audience. Schmitt has already pointed out

²⁸See Burghart Wachinger, "Der Dekalog als Ordnungsschema für Exempelsammlungen: Der 'Große Seelentrost', das 'Promptuarium exemplorum' des Andreas Hondorff und die 'Locorum communium collectanea' des Johannes Manlius," in *Exempel und Exempelsammlungen*, ed. Walter Haug und Burghart Wachinger (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1991), 239-263.

²⁹*Der Grosse Seelentrost*, ed. Schmitt, 140*-141*.

the contradiction between the purpose of this story as an *exemplum* for the concept of "truwe" [loyalty, faith] and the duel which it describes--a duel which not only costs a man his life, but also constitutes an act of blasphemy.³⁰ But the concept of "truwe" promoted in this Eighth Commandment of *Der Große Seelentrost* becomes even more problematic when we take a closer look at its most important subcategory, which is the ideal of exemplary male friendship. The celebrated ideal of male "truwe" as a prime symbol of male homosocial bonding loses much of its glamour, if one chooses to examine this concept from the point of view of those who are themselves excluded *from*, and often victimized *by*, these male bonds, but who nevertheless play an important part in creating and maintaining them, namely the brides, wives and children of the male heroes. As the following examination demonstrates, the concept of "truwe" is gendered; it is not only defined differently for man and woman, but it also has a different impact on the life and behaviour of men and women.

The Eighth Commandment in *Der Große Seelentrost* begins with a formulaic dialogue between spiritual father and spiritual child:

Vater leue, ik bidde yuw dorch den rijken god, leret my, welk ys dat achtete bod. Kint leue, dat wil ik leren dij, vp dat du gode biddest vor my. Dat achtete bot ys also: Mynsche, du ne schalt nicht valschliken tugen. Kint leue, dat schaltu also vornemen: Du schalt alle logene vnde alle valscheit vormiden vnde schalt wesen truwe vnde warafftich.

Der Große Seelentrost, 23

[Dear father, I ask you in the name of mighty God to teach me the Eighth

³⁰Ibid., 141*.

Commandment. Dear child, that I will teach you so that you may speak to God in my favour. The Eighth Commandment is this: you shall not bear false witness. Dear child, you shall understand that in this way: You shall avoid all lying and falseness and you shall be faithful and honest.]

The *exemplum* entitled "Zwei Freunde (Athis und Prophilius)"³¹ tells the story of two friends, a merchant of Egypt and a merchant of India. As the subtitle already indicates, this *exemplum* is a variant of the well-known Greek tale of *Athis and Prophilius*.³² The bond of friendship between the merchant of Egypt and the merchant of India is based on the principle of the exchange of women as the most precious category of gifts, as defined by Lévi-Strauss. The merchant of Egypt takes this principle of exchange to its logical extreme by giving his friend, the merchant of India, not only his own bride, but also her dowry, when he finds out about his friend's love for her. In accordance with many variants of this tale, the bride has no voice, but remains a passive and mute object of exchange between the two men. However, the bride's voicelessness and passivity should not be interpreted as signs of compliance, as may be seen from a comparison with some Oriental versions of this tale, as described by Wilhelm Grimm. In a tale from *1001 Nights*, for example, the young woman Zuleika, who has been divorced by her husband Attaf and given to her husband's friend Giafar, tries to influence her fate at least verbally, when she informs the astonished Giafar about this act of

³¹*Der Grosse Seelentrost*, 234-36.

³²On this tale, see especially Wilhelm Grimm, "Die Sage von Athis und Prophilius," *ZfDA* 12 (1865): 185-203.

exchange, and points out to him that she still regards herself as Attaf's wife.³³ Giafar then refrains from touching her. Although this restraint on Giafar's part has to be interpreted as a token of his friendship to Attaf, rather than as a sign of his respect for Zuleika's personal feelings and her own free will, this tale demonstrates that the male authors or tellers of the story were aware of the psychological impact that such an act of exchange could have on the exchanged woman herself. If they chose to ignore the woman's point of view, usually simply by denying her a voice in the text, they did so as a sign of their privileging of male bonds over male-female or even conjugal relationships. In this light it seems only justified when Gayle Rubin in her above quoted critique of Lévi-Strauss's theory of early kinship systems pictures woman as "a conduit of a relationship rather than a partner to it."³⁴ But even a century ago Wilhelm Grimm expressed his uneasiness about the depicted exchange of wives and brides, which he called "anstössig und widerwärtig"³⁵--especially if the new marriage is actually consummated, as for example in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, but also in *Der Große Seelentrost*.

Der Große Seelentrost relates further how the bond created through the exchange of the bride, proves to be so strong that the merchant of India offers to sacrifice his own life when his friend is wrongly convicted of murder. The gift of the merchant of Egypt, his own bride, is countered, or even exceeded, by the merchant of India's offer to sacrifice his life for his friend. Again, what is not considered is the effect that the merchant of India's sacrifice of

³³Ibid., 195.

³⁴Rubin, 174.

³⁵Grimm, 203.

his own life would have on his wife, who in the case of his death would lose a second husband, again as a result of male bonding. When the actual murderer turns himself in, thus making the sacrifice unnecessary, the merchant of India attempts to counter his friend's gift in a more material way by offering him half of his wealth, and in other variants of the tale also his sister or another female relative. The carefree way in which women are substituted for other kinds of gifts in the different endings of the story points once more to their objectified status within the process of male bonding. Nevertheless, the objectification and exchange of women in this tale meets with the full approval of the narrator, who assures the reader of the ethical value of the depicted male-male interactions. His final remark "Das was eyn ganß frunt" [this was a real friend] places male friendship not only above male-female relationships, but also above a husband's moral responsibility for the well-being of his wife.

In a similar manner the friendship between Amicus and Amelius, described in the tale of the same title,³⁶ is based on the structure of the mutual exchange of gifts. Yet this tale demonstrates even more strikingly the inherent cruelty of the concept of "truwe" promoted in *Der Große Seelentrost*. The story relates how Amicus and Amelius, who are born so similar in appearance that nobody can tell them apart, prove their friendship in various, sometimes rather drastic, ways. A comparison of the relationship between Amicus and Amelius with the relationship between Amelius and the female protagonist (King Karl's daughter) makes obvious the differences between male homosocial and male-female heterosexual bonds in this tale. The bond between Amicus and Amelius is characterized by mutual love and respect, symbolized by their embraces, kisses and tears when they meet again after a long separation.

³⁶*Der Grosse Seelentrost*, 229-233.

Amelius's relationship with King Karl's daughter, on the other hand, is based on blatant disrespect and uninhibited male sexuality. When King Karl's daughter, despite her love for Amelius, refuses to go to bed with him before marriage, he simply rapes her:

Do hadde de konningk eyne dochter, de wan Amelius leff, vnd se hadde
 Amelius wedder leff, doch nicht vppe vntucht, sunder vppe eyn erlijk echte.
 Do vordroch Amelius sin bekoringhe vnde nam de juncfruwen ware, dar he se
 allene vant, vnde dede er gewalt.

Der Große Seelentrost, 230

*[The King had a daughter whom Amelius loved and who in return loved
 Amelius, but not in an unchaste way, only within the confines of marriage.
 Then Amelius yielded to his temptation and he recognized her, and he raped
 the virgin, when he found her alone.]*

The tears of love and joy shed between Amicus and Amelius find their distorted mirror image in the tears of shame and humiliation King Karl's daughter has to shed after Amelius has not only betrayed her love but also robbed her of her virginity, and thus deprived her of the possibility of an honourable marriage and a respected position in medieval society.

Yet this rape is more than only an act of physical violence against a young woman, for at the same time Amelius also abuses the trust of his host, King Karl himself. *Raptus* in medieval Europe was, as Gravdal points out, primarily regarded as "a kind of theft against the man under whose authority the female victim lived,"³⁷ or, as Brownmiller puts it, "as a

³⁷Kathryn Gravdal, "Chrétien de Troyes, Gratian, and the Medieval Romance of Sexual Violence," *Signs* 17 (1991/92): 566. See also James A. Brundage, "Rape and Seduction in the Medieval Canon Law," in *Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church*, ed. Vern L. Bullough

property crime of man against man" (with the woman being the property), rather than as a violation of a "female's right to her bodily integrity."³⁸ The definition of *raptus* shows that, as Gravdal maintains, Roman as well as canon law protects the father's rights, rather than his daughter's. For this reason it seems only fit that Amelius has to prove his innocence in a judicial combat against another man. His adversary fights on behalf of the king, whose property is the young woman who has been raped.

In this precarious situation Amicus proves his "truwe" by helping Amelius deceive not only King Karl (and with him his daughter), but also God himself by taking his friend's place in the duel. This act of exemplary male "truwe" again requires an exchange of women: for the time of the duel, Amicus gives Amelius not only his house and servants, but also his wife, and asks him to keep her if he does not survive the fight. Although this transfer may to some degree be motivated by a feeling of responsibility for his wife, whom Amicus wants to know in good hands after his death, it also implies the objectification of the woman, who, in contrast to the bride in the story of "Athis and Prophilias," is not even aware of the transaction. After Amicus has won the duel and received the hand of King Karl's daughter, he "trades her in" for his own wife. King Karl's daughter's role as a mere object in all these transactions between men becomes especially obvious when one considers that up to this point in the story, she has been victimized three times: she has first been raped by a man, then been given as a prize by one man (i.e. her father) to another, and finally been exchanged between two men--in all three cases without having any influence on her own fate.

and James Brundage (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1982), 141-158.

³⁸Brownmiller, 8.

As it turns out, Amelius, who without scruples rapes King Karl's daughter, reacts almost hysterically when in bed with Amicus's wife. Although Amicus does not explicitly forbid him to touch his wife, Amelius demonstrates his "truwe" by respecting his friend's property: he not only puts the proverbial sword between himself and his friend's wife, but even threatens to kill her with the sword if she dare touch him. One might, of course, argue that Amelius here, consciously or unconsciously, transfers his own sexual desires to the woman who suddenly appears as the potential rapist he actually is. He obviously takes for granted his right to *his* bodily integrity, or, as Brownmiller puts it, "the right *not* to have intercourse with a specific (and here I substitute "man" for) woman"³⁹--the self-same right he himself has denied to King Karl's daughter.

Yet the process of exchange goes even further. When some time later Amicus contracts leprosy and is driven away from hearth and home by his wife and retainers, Amelius sacrifices his own children for his friend's cure. Following God's command, he kills his children with his sword and sprinkles his sick friend with their blood. In this process, King Karl's daughter is victimized a fourth time by losing her children--and again in the name of "truwe." The chain of events which started with the rape of a young woman, ends with the killing of her children by her rapist.

Against these background acts of violence against a woman and her children, it might seem strange that Amicus's wife, who has "only" abandoned her sick husband, is judged in the most severe way: as a punishment for her "vntruwe" against her husband, the Devil breaks her neck. Yet as a closer look reveals, this spectacular punishment for the wife's

³⁹Ibid.

wrongdoing serves a twofold purpose: first, it provides a justification for the general exclusion of women from the male bonds in this story; and second, it points to the characteristics of the concept of female "truwe" promoted in the Eighth Commandment of *Der Große Seelentrost*. While throughout the story of "Amicus und Amelius" women are reduced to the status of mere objects (of pleasure, exchange etc.) simply because of they *are* women, the story still attempts to blame them, at least partly, for their status as objects. The "vntruwe" demonstrated by Amicus's wife stands as an example of a woman's innate inability to reach the standards of male "truwe," and thus seems to justify women's exclusion from positions of trust, reserved for male-male relationships. Of course, neither the story of "Amicus und Amelius" nor that of "Athis und Prophilias" ever base a woman's status on her personal qualities, but women are indiscriminately used as a means of promoting and consolidating male-male relationships. Women are by nature of their gender excluded from male bonding, be it "deserved" or not.⁴⁰ Female "truwe," on the other hand, as it is defined for instance in the *exemplum* of "Susanna" in the Eighth Commandment, is directed exclusively toward the male authorities in a woman's life, i.e. father, husband and God, and requires that a woman passively endure every possible form of hardship, and even death, in the name of her relationship of subordination to the male authorities who govern her life. Thus, by its very nature, the concept of female "truwe" demands that a woman be a compliant object of

⁴⁰The exclusive nature of male "truwe" which becomes obvious in *Der Große Seelentrost* seems to support Eve Sedgwick's classification of homosocial bonding as inherently gender separatist. For this reason Sedgwick places male homosocial bonding in one group with lesbian separatism or manhood-initiation models--Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: U of California Press, 1990), 88. Of course, with regard to their respective power positions within contemporary societies, male homosocial bonds and lesbian separatist movements differ greatly.

exchange between men in order to further the personal well-being of individual men as well as that of male dominated medieval society in general. In its emphasis on the virtue of passive devotion to a male master, female "truwe" resembles the "truwe" of certain animals, usually lions, as becomes obvious in two *exempla* of the Eighth Commandment: "Der Ritter und der Löwe" and "Der Löwe des hl. Hieronymus." Both texts describe the relationship between a man and a lion, in which the animal fulfils the function of the subordinate "female" helper. As the first of the two *exempla*, "Der Ritter und der Löwe," shows, the lion's devotion may even include the sacrifice of its own life for the benefit of its male master.

In "Amicus und Amelius" the women's dependent status is further expressed and reinforced by their namelessness: unlike the main male characters the female characters do not appear as autonomous entities, but are defined solely in relationship to specific men, namely as daughters or wives. It is ironical that even when leaving her husband, Amicus's wife still remains exactly that: the wife of Amicus. Thus it is hardly surprising that the concept of male "truwe," which stands for a relationship of mutual trust and shared responsibilities between two equals, cannot exist between a man and a woman. A woman is merely regarded, and used, as an object of exchange between men. Consequently, the brutal punishment of Amicus's wife is directed against a woman who has dared to violate the ideal of passive female "truwe" by "disposing" of her husband at the very moment when this husband loses his superior position in their relationship due to his sickness and becomes dependent on her.

Seen from a female perspective, of course, it seems scarcely surprising, and only justified, that male "vntruwe" against brides and wives is eventually countered by a wife's

"vntruwe" against her husband. But the text suggests here two standards, one for a wife's behaviour toward her husband, and another for a husband's toward his wife. The "vntruwe" demonstrated by Amelius's wife is contrasted with the exemplary male "truwe" Amicus and Amelius display toward each other. Amelius not only sacrifices his own children for Amicus's cure, but after the miraculous resurrection of the children the two friends remain united for the rest of their lives. Their union is strengthened by a symbolic act of exclusion of Amelius's wife from her husband's life, since from the time Amelius takes Amicus into his house he ceases his marital relations with his wife. The special union between Amicus and Amelius is further symbolized by their identical clothing, which makes them appear so similar that they seem to merge into one person, so that nobody in the household, not even Amelius's wife, is able to tell them apart. Even when the two friends are dead and buried in separate graves, they do not remain divided for long. When one day one of the graves collapses it is found empty, and the two friends are detected mysteriously re-united in the other grave. The narrator comments on this: "Also bleuen se kumpane in dem dode, de truwe kumpane waren an dem leuende" [so they remained friends in death, who had been faithful friends in life; 233]. The quasi-marriage between Amicus and Amelius finds its expression not only in this comment (which echoes the promise given in the wedding ceremony to remain together in good and bad days, until death do them part), but furthermore in their physical union after their death. Thus, the relationship between Amicus and Amelius, which in the course of the story becomes more and more marriage-like, might be interpreted as a confirmation of Eve Sedgwick's assumption about a potentially unbroken continuum between homosocial and homosexual male bonds. This continuum appears as a possibility, which the

text immediately forecloses: Amicus and Amelius are dead when they are finally physically united. For the different treatment of male-male and male-female "truwe" this final union symbolizes the inherent superiority of exclusively male bonds over other kinds of interpersonal relationships.

The spiritual father of *Der Große Seelentrost* concludes this story with a short *moralisatio* admonishing his spiritual child to understand the story as a lesson that "valscheit" [disloyalty] will not go unpunished, whereas "truwe" will be rewarded. Thus not only the events in the text itself, but also the spiritual father, and by implication the Christian Church, sanction the behaviour of Amicus and Amelius. This means that rape, the cover-up of rape, the objectification and exchange of women, and finally the killing of children are excused if they serve the ideal of the "truwe" of one male to another. What emerges from this is that the term "truwe" as used in *Der Große Seelentrost* is male centred: it is usually seen from the vantage point of male interests, to which everything else is subordinated. This pervasive masculine ethic probably accounts for a revealing lapse in Annemarie Hübner's article on *Der Große Seelentrost* in the first edition of the *Verfasserlexikon*. Hübner describes the dialogue between spiritual father and spiritual child as a "Zwiegespräch zwischen einem geistlichen Vater und einem *Jüngling*" [a dialogue between a spiritual father and a young man].⁴¹ Even though Hübner is factually wrong, she (probably unknowingly) acknowledges the fact that *Der Große Seelentrost* caters primarily to the needs and interests of its young male audience, addressing the sons rather than the daughters.

⁴¹Annemarie Hübner, "Seelentrost," in *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*, ed. Karl Langosch, vol. 4 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1951), 148.

In the light of the stories of "Amicus und Amelius" and "Athis und Prophilius" and their legitimization of violence against women and children, the title of this spiritual work, "der sele trost," suddenly appears almost cynical. Yet *Der Große Seelentrost* constitutes a typical example of the medieval Christian Church's doctrines on the relationship between the "stronger" and the "weaker" gender, and points to how these doctrines were promoted in the fourteenth century.

b) Marquard vom Stein: *Der Ritter vom Turn*

"Wherefore, fair sister, if you have another husband after me, know that you should think much of his person, for after that a woman has lost her first husband and marriage she commonly findeth it hard to find a second to her liking, according to her estate, and she remaineth long while all lonely and disconsolate and the more so if she lose the second. Wherefore love your husband's person carefully, and I pray you keep him in clean linen, for that is your business [...]"⁴²

Most readers will agree with Eileen Power that these words written by the Ménagier de Paris to his young wife at the end of the fourteenth century are "surely the strangest ever

⁴²*The Goodman of Paris (Le Ménagier de Paris): A Treatise on Moral and Domestic Economy by a Citizen of Paris (c. 1393)*, ed. and trans. Eileen Power (London: Routledge, 1928), 171.

given by a husband for instructing his wife."⁴³ The *Ménagier de Paris*, who at the time of his marriage to a young girl of fifteen was himself already beyond the age of sixty, intends to instruct his wife in the art of serving her husband and of supervising a large household. Yet with this work the *Ménagier* plans more than only to secure his own personal comfort, for at the same time he wishes to provide for the well-being of his potential successor. Aware that he himself has probably only a few more years to live, he urges his wife to take a second husband after his death and he hopes that with her newly-acquired skills his wife will give him, the first husband, credit in the eyes of her second husband. What is illustrated in the *Ménagier's* instructional work is the preparation of a woman for an exchange between two men--a normal transaction according to medieval instructional treatises, and unique here only with respect to the person of the instructor. One may assume that the *Ménagier's* age, which makes his relationship to his wife resemble more that between a father and his daughter than that between a husband and his wife, prompts him to play a role usually reserved for the father of a young girl, namely that of a mediator between his daughter and his future son-in-law. The *Ménagier de Paris*, in speaking *to* his wife is at the same time speaking *through* his wife--to another man.

Marquard vom Stein's *Der Ritter vom Turn* displays a similar relationship between three parties, in this case a father, his two daughters, and the (so far unknown) person(s) of the future son(s)-in-law. As the knight points out again and again, the most important goal in a woman's life is to find and keep a husband, even if sometimes under great personal

⁴³Eileen Power, "The *Ménagier's* Wife," in *Medieval People* (1924; reprint Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1951), 99.

sacrifice. The many *exempla* used to illustrate the knight's instructions often contrast the lives of two or more sisters and distribute reward and punishment in the form of success or failure on the marriage market. This outcome is important not only for the daughter, but also for the father and the network of male homosocial bonding in which he participates. Though the latter aim is not explicitly mentioned, it can be deduced from the text. The father's personal interest in making his daughter attractive to an influential suitor of high standing becomes obvious from many of the *exempla* he uses: the ideal outcome of the stories is that a mighty king is attracted so strongly by a daughter's outstanding qualities that he asks for her hand, and through the marriage creates a powerful bond between the daughter's family and his own. In a similar way, the knight's interest in his daughter's good marital relationship to her husband is based on more than just his wish for the woman's personal happiness. Here, too, the relationship between his daughter and his son-in-law has an impact on the father's own relationship to the younger man and his family.

The first *exemplum* Marquard gives his daughters contrasts "good" and "bad" female behaviour in a context which probably has a lot in common with the situation his own daughters find or will soon find themselves in. Two sisters, not yet married but already burning with carnal desire ("fleischliche liebe"), fall in love with two young knights and invite them to visit them at night in their common bed-chamber. In contrast to her older sister, the younger has never abandoned the habit of saying a prayer for the dead when waking up at night, a habit for which she has often been scorned by her sister. It is, nevertheless, this habit that saves her from a shameful death and eternal damnation. When one night her lover, as promised, visits the house and approaches the young woman's bed, he

finds himself confronted with a gathering of ghosts in white blankets. This vision not only drives the hopeful lover away, but makes him seriously ill. From that moment on, the younger sister changes her life and is eventually rewarded with an honourable marriage. The older sister, however, who had given up her religious habits long before, meets not only her lover, but also a terrible fate:

Aber der eltern dochtern / die dise mit jrem gebett hat verspottet / ergieng es
anders / Dann der ander ritter kan zu[o] deren vnd beschlieff sy / das sy
schwanger / vnd durch ordnung des keyzers jrs vatters / heymlich by der nacht
ertrenckt / vnd der ritter lebendig geschunden ward /

Der Ritter vom Turn, 92

*[But the older daughter, who had scorned the other one because of her prayer,
met a different fate: the knight came to her and slept with her so that she
became pregnant. On the command of her father, the emperor, she was
secretly drowned at night, and the knight was flayed alive.]*

On the surface, this *exemplum* is about detestable female behaviour and its possible consequences for the woman. What Marquard does not mention, though, is the father's personal interest in the life and fate of his daughters. While the younger sister eventually fulfils her duty as an object of exchange between two powerful rulers, namely her father, who is called the "keyser" of Constantinople, and her future husband, a mighty King of Greece, and thus proves to be profitable to her family, the older sister turns out to be a failure in several respects. Through her defloration she not only sullies her reputation as a virtuous woman and thereby automatically loses her value on the marriage market, but worse yet, she

hurts her father's reputation as a good instructor and guardian of his daughters. The fact that it is her father himself who has his older daughter executed reveals the material value his daughters have even for their own father as tokens in his negotiations with other men. His pragmatic considerations override his paternal feelings for his daughter and make it possible for him to kill his own flesh and blood rather than lose respect in the eyes of the male community of noble knights. It might be said that through the execution of his older daughter the "keyser" of Constantinople makes a powerful promise to the community of potential suitors--the promise that the daughters he eventually offers for marriage really *are* what they seem to be, virtuous virgins. On a second level, by instructing his daughters in the proper feminine virtues, Marquard establishes and strengthens his position as a "supplier" of good (and especially "undamaged") products of exchange for other men.

Yet even after her marriage a daughter may still pose a danger to her father's reputation. The above mentioned link between a daughter's performance as a wife and her father's reputation as her instructor is illustrated by another *exemplum*. Here the father's failure as an instructor and as a provider of well-trained marriageable women becomes clear when one of his two daughters destroys her marriage because she proves unable to give up a bad habit: as a compulsive eater she likes to have a good meal not only in the morning, after she has hardly spoken a prayer or two, but also secretly at night, when her parents, and later her husband, are asleep. This habit, which shows the daughter's inability to resist bodily desires, is explicitly blamed on her father's incompetence. As her primary guardian and instructor, he has failed to break the girl's strong will while it was still possible, and instead has given in to her too often. The woman's eating habits, acquired early in her youth, prove

later to be unalterable and bring about the failure of her marriage. When one night her husband finds her in the kitchen not only eating but also flirting with two male servants he flies into a rage and starts to beat the servants. By accident he also damages one of his wife's eyes. Because of her disability, the knight begins to hate his wife, and he subsequently turns his love to another woman. This *exemplum* shows that a daughter's bad habit not only throws a negative light on her own character, but at the same time reflects back on her father and his performance as a parent. It may be assumed that the broken marriage between the knight and his wife proves negative also for the relationship between father and son-in-law, and thus damages the male bonds established through the exchange of the daughter. The unspoken message for potential male readers of this *exemplum* is that a daughter has to be carefully "trained" in order to properly fulfil her role in the establishment of male homosocial bonds. If a father fails to break his daughter's will, the daughter will soon become a source of danger not only for his own reputation but for his bonds with other men.

Yet the fear of endangering her own reputation, as well as her (potentially beloved) father's might not always be a sufficiently strong deterrent for an independently minded and "lusty" young woman. Especially her sexual desires constitute a constant source of anxiety for a father determined to keep his daughter marriageable. Male control of female sexuality probably accounts for the many incidents of rape or attempted rape in *Der Ritter vom Turn*. Male abuse of power (expressed through physical and sexual violence) constitutes a permanent threat for the women described in these *exempla*. The dangers that even a virtuous virgin faces in her daily life become transparent in the knight's matter-of-fact account of a young woman who has provoked the desire of a powerful nobleman. The virgin hides in a

hole, where she is, however, soon discovered by the nobleman's spies. Yet, as in the above mentioned *exemplum* of the two sisters, the young woman is saved by her religious faith. When the nobleman tries to rape her, she is suddenly surrounded by ten thousand of spirits of the dead. Not surprisingly, her unwanted suitor flees with the promise to leave her alone in the future. Marquard's introductory words to this exemplum, "Ouch eyn andre andechtige iünkfrow / die eyn grosser herr ye mit gewalt / und über iren willen beschlaffen vnd enteren wolt" [Also another pious virgin, whom a powerful nobleman wanted to take to his bed by force and against her will and whose honour he wanted to destroy],⁴⁴ point to the frequency of these kinds of violent sexual acts in medieval every-day life. And even though the knight makes it clear that in this instance the nobleman has to be regarded as the perpetrator, he at the same time depicts violent male desire as unchangeable, a regrettable yet "natural" male reaction to a beautiful female body.

As Ingrid Bennewitz points out, in *Der Ritter vom Turn* it is promoted as a fact of life that men rape, whenever they have the slightest opportunity.⁴⁵ It is the woman's responsibility to ensure her survival in a world seemingly full of male "predators." Bennewitz pinpoints the two strategies of "self-defence" that the knight recommends to his female audience, namely a religious life and the restriction of mental and physical liberty. Only a woman spiritually controlled by a patriarchal God and physically controlled by a patriarchal father or husband has sufficient chance to remain unharmed in a world controlled by men. As I have already mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Bennewitz remarks upon the fact that the knight

⁴⁴Marquard vom Stein, 92.

⁴⁵Bennewitz, 123.

rarely judges violent sexual approaches negatively. I would venture a step further and claim that rape fulfils even a positive function for male homosocial bonds. In an almost cynical way, the threat of rape is used as a pedagogical device. In Brownmiller's sense, rape appears as "a means by which all men keep all women in a state of fear."⁴⁶ At the same time, Elisabeth Robertson's question formulated in the *Medieval Feminist Newsletter* (as to whether rape is not a necessary procedure, "fundamental to the smooth operations of society"⁴⁷), can be answered positively for Marquard vom Stein's *Der Ritter vom Turn*. In this work, rape is not treated as "aberrant," as the crime it legally is, but as a pedagogical means. Rape is used as the ultimate means to keep women under the control of their male guardians, and to ensure an undisturbed traffic in women necessary for the formation of male homosocial bonds.

2.2. Fiction

a) *Nibelungenlied*

The important role of male bonding in the *Nibelungenlied* has often been noted, and

⁴⁶Brownmiller, 5.

⁴⁷Elisabeth Robertson, "Comprehending Rape in Medieval England, in *Medieval Feminist Newsletter* 21 (1996): 14.

especially the feudal relationship between lord and vassal has more than once been the focus of attention. The term *Nibelungentreue*, coined by Imperial Chancellor Fürst von Bülow in a speech to the German *Reichstag* on March 29, 1909, is probably the best-known example of the use and abuse of the concept of male bonding in the *Nibelungenlied*:

"Meine Herren, ich habe irgendwo ein höhnisches Wort gelesen, über unsere Vasallenschaft gegenüber Österreich-Ungarn. Das Wort ist einfältig! Es gibt hier keinen Streit um den Vortritt wie zwischen den beiden Königinnen im Nibelungenliede; aber die Nibelungentreue wollen wir aus unserem Verhältnis zu Österreich-Ungarn nicht ausschalten, die wollen wir gegenseitig wahren."⁴⁸

As becomes obvious from this speech, competitive, and destructive, relationships are *expressis verbis* characterized as female, symbolized by the quarrel between the two queens, Kriemhild and Brünhild. This in turn implies that constructive bonds, symbolized by the legendary *Nibelungentreue*, are regarded as a male domain--thus rendering the *Nibelungentreue* similar in character to the male "truwe" already observed in *Der Große Seelentrost*. This impression is strengthened by the fact that the speech is addressed exclusively at men ("meine Herren"). The inclusive pronouns "wir" and "uns" refer to the male community, while women are cast in the role of the destructive "Other" ("die beiden Königinnen").

⁴⁸Quoted by Francis G. Gentry, "Die Rezeption des Nibelungenliedes in der Weimarer Republik," in *Das Weiterleben des Mittelalters in der deutschen Literatur*, ed. James F. Poag and Gerhild Scholz-Williams (Königstein/Ts.: Athenäum, 1983), 146: "Gentlemen, I have somewhere read a scornful word about our vassalage to Austria-Hungary. This word is simple-minded! Here there is no quarrel about precedence as between the two queens in the *Nibelungenlied*. We do not wish to eliminate the *Nibelungentreue* from our relationship to Austria-Hungary. Instead, we want to keep it to each other."

Two of the *Nibelungenlied's* prominent expressions concerning relationships between the male protagonists, MHG *triuwe* (faith) and *vriunt* (friend), have already been analyzed by Francis Gentry. Gentry also distinguishes between two different kinds of bonds depicted in the *Nibelungenlied*, namely formal bonds between lord and vassal, and personal bonds created through kinship, marriage and friendship:

... while the structure of the 'Nibelungenlied' reflects the feudal system, two types of relationships exist within this system, the *formal* in which the parties are bound by legal ties, i.e. vassal and lord, and the *personal* in which the parties are bound by ties of emotion or personal preference, i.e. members of a family or friends.⁴⁹

Gentry concentrates primarily on the characteristics of existing male-male relationships while ignoring the role women (have to) play in creating and maintaining these networks of male relationships. The most important male bond depicted in the *Nibelungenlied*, the bond between Siegfried and Gunther, constitutes a prime example for both the constructive and the destructive role women can play in the network of male-male relationships. Like the bonds between Amicus and Amelius, and Athis and Prophilias in *Der Grosse Seelentrost*, the bond between Siegfried and Gunther is based on the mutual exchange of women.

Jerold Frakes emphasizes this underlying structure of exchange when--in a deliberately provocative feminist and, in his own words, "vastly oversimplified" way--he summarizes the plot of the *Nibelungenlied* as follows:

⁴⁹Francis G. Gentry, *Triuwe and Vriunt in the Nibelungenlied* (Amsterdam: Rodopi N.V., 1975), 13.

A woman is bartered as wife by her weak oldest brother to a strong foreigner in exchange for his raping into submission a foreign wife for that brother; the husband of that bartered wife is then murdered by one of her brother's gang, whom she then brings to justice.⁵⁰

The process which Frakes so acidly (and with some justification) describes as "bartering" commences in the third *âventiure*. Siegfried, the young prince of Xanten, travels to the court of Burgundy, which is ruled by the brothers Gunther, Gêrnôt and Gîselher, in order to win the hand of their sister Kriemhild and the rule over their country by means of a combat. Already Siegfried's choice of his object of love is strongly influenced by the network of male relationships into which he is imbedded. As the *âventiure* relates, not only the rumour of Kriemhild's virtue and beauty creates Siegfried's desire, but also his knowledge of the many male suitors she has already drawn to Burgundy. According to Sedgwick, who here relies heavily on René Girard's concept of triangular desire,⁵¹ major European works of fiction offer many examples in which "the choice of the beloved is determined in the first place, not by the qualities of the beloved, but by the beloved's already being the choice of the person who has been chosen as a rival."⁵² The mediators/rivals represent the third instance in the triangle between the desiring subject and the object of his desire. In the *Nibelungenlied*, Kriemhild's unsuccessful suitors may be regarded as mediators/rivals between the desiring subject,

⁵⁰Frakes, 17.

⁵¹René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1961).

⁵²Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 21.

Siegfried, and the object of his desire, Kriemhild. This constellation becomes obvious when Siegfried explains his interest in Kriemhild with the assertion that any man, including the mightiest of emperors, would be honoured to have her as his wife:

dô sprach der küene Sîvrit: sô wil ich Kriemhilden nemen,
 Die scoenen juncfrouwen von Burgonden lant
 durch ir unmâzen scoene. daz ist mir wol bekant:
 nie keiser wart sô rîche, der wolde haben wîp,
 im zæme wol ze minnen der rîchen küneginne lîp.

Nibelungenlied, stanzas 48-49

*["I shall take Kriemhild the fair maiden of Burgundy," he answered boldly, "on account of her very great beauty, since even if the mightiest of emperors wished to marry, I know he would not demean himself in loving the noble princess."]*⁵³

This sharing of "sexual territory" links Siegfried to the male community of suitors and thus creates male homosocial bonding. Similar constellations may also be found in the second part of the *Nibelungenlied*. When after the death of his wife Helche, King Etzel decides to woo Kriemhild, he relies not only on the expertise of his consultants, but also on Kriemhild's first husband Siegfried, as mediators of his desire:

Sît daz erstorben wære der schoenen Helchen lîp,
 si sprâchen: "welt ir immer gewinnen edel wîp,
 die hœchsten unt die besten, die künic ie gewan,

⁵³The *Nibelungenlied*, trans. Hatto, 23.

sô nemt die selben vrouwen; der starke Sifrit was ir man."

Nibelungenlied, stanza 1144

[*Now that lovely Helche was dead, "If you wish to win the hand of a noble woman, the best and most exalted that any king ever had, then take this lady," they urged him. "Her husband was mighty Siegfried."*]

An even stronger relationship between desiring subject and mediator emerges in the 37th *âventiure*, where Giselher tells Ruedeger, the father of his fiancée, that he has chosen his daughter primarily because of his faith in him, the father. All three of these episodes demonstrate that not only the act of negotiating a marriage is essentially in male hands, but that even the choice of the female partner is to a great extent male-male oriented.

The outlined interdependence between male homosocial and male-female heterosexual relationships also becomes obvious in the scene describing Siegfried's arrival in Burgundy. The constellation of a *man* willing to fight against another *man* for the hand of a woman again attributes at least as much importance to the male-male relationship between the kings of Burgundy and Siegfried as to the potential male-female relationship between Siegfried and Kriemhild, because the latter is obviously dependent on the quality of the former. Even in this state of hostility, the relationship between the suitor and the desired woman's male kin may be called "homosocial," since according to Sedgwick every kind of "affective or social force" or "glue" that binds two parties together can be regarded as "homosocial desire," "even when its manifestation is hostility or hatred."⁵⁴

Following the peaceful settlement of their initial dispute, Siegfried remains at the

⁵⁴Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 2.

court of Burgundy for a full year without being given the opportunity to cast a single glance at Kriemhild. This situation changes after his successful battle against the Saxons in the fourth *âventiure*, when the kings of Burgundy use their sister Kriemhild's kiss as a "gift" to reward him. The underlying reason for the kings' promotion of a relationship between Siegfried and Kriemhild is, of course, primarily self-oriented, as may be seen from King Gêrnôt's considerations prior to the meeting between Siegfried and Kriemhild:

Ir heizet Sîvriden zuo mîner swester kumen,
 daz in diu maget grüeze, des hab wir immer frumen.
 diu nie gegruozte recken, diu sol in grüezen pflegen,
 dâ mit wir haben gewonnen den vil zierlîchen degen.

Nibelungenlied, stanza 289

*[Present Siegfried to my sister, so that the maiden may accord him her greeting--we shall never cease to reap the benefit. Although she has never addressed a knight before, let her now bid Siegfried welcome. With that we shall attach the splendid warrior to ourselves.]*⁵⁵

The strategy of creating male bonding by exchanging women, or their favours, is taken further in the sixth *âventiure*, where Siegfried demands and is granted the hand of Kriemhild in return for his helping Gunther to woo the strong Queen Brünhild of Îsenstein:

Des antwurte Sîvrit, des Sigmundes sun:
 "gîstu mir dîne swester, sô wil ich ez tuon,
 die scoenen Kriemhilde..."

⁵⁵*The Nibelungenlied*, trans. Hatto, 48.

Nibelungenlied, stanza 333

["I will do it, if you will give me your sister fair Kriemhild, the noble princess," answered Siegfried, Siegmund's son.]⁵⁶

The way in which Gunther and (the invisible) Siegfried are depicted during the games at Ísenstein as "the one doing the motions and the other doing the deeds" (stanza 454) may be regarded as a symbol of their homosocial union, which is held together by, but at the same time ultimately directed against, a woman. At the same time, this scene can be read as a blurring of the boundaries between the realms of the homosocial and the homosexual: for the short duration of the contest the two men appear as one in the eyes of the spectators. And even though Brünhild's wooing-games were meant to transform the typical female role of the exchanged object that is given as a price from one man to another man into that of an active participant in the marriage-negotiations, Brünhild in the end nevertheless, unknowingly, becomes a passive object of exchange between two men. Siegfried, the actual winner, gives Brünhild to Gunther in exchange for Gunther's sister Kriemhild. Despite the text's repeated assurances about Kriemhild's positive feelings for the man who receives her as a gift, her role as a prize is not really obscured.

The wedding night between Gunther and Brünhild provides a further demonstration of how male bonds, created through women, may make the subjugation of these same women possible. Gunther, who is unable to consummate the marriage because of Brünhild's resistance, has to draw on Siegfried's help in sexually subduing his wife. Again, Siegfried assumes the position of Brünhild's rightful husband, and again, he relinquishes his rights to

⁵⁶Ibid., 54.

her and "hands her over" to Gunther. This scene shows Siegfried and Gunther in the closest possible union, tied together by their communal rape of Kriemhild and the secret of Gunther's "impotence," a secret that only the two of them share. This scene may be seen as an example for Brownmiller's thesis that "one of the earliest forms of male bonding must have been the gang rape of one woman by a band of marauding men."⁵⁷ Brownmiller is less polemical than she may sound. According to historical sources, gang rape in the Middle Ages served as a means of creating and consolidating youth groups. As Jeffrey Richards reports,

Gangs of these young men wandered Dijon at night seeking to dispell boredom by fighting, drinking, gaming, dicing, taunting the watch, and staging gang rapes. Between 1436 and 1486, 125 rapes--80 per cent of them gang rapes--are recorded for Dijon, probably only a proportion of those actually committed, because of non-reporting [...]. The activity was spread throughout the year, took place once or twice a month and was a regular feature of the life of the young, a *rite de passage*.⁵⁸

According to Richards, similar gang-rapes are reported for medieval Italy.⁵⁹ Even though Gunther and Siegfried probably do not qualify as "marauders," their communal rape of Brünhild follows the same pattern.

However, despite its intimacy, the bond between Siegfried and Gunther does not last, and Siegfried is finally murdered by Gunther's vassal Hagen. The analysis of the events

⁵⁷Brownmiller, 5.

⁵⁸Richards, 39.

⁵⁹Ibid.

leading up to the slaying of Siegfired requires a closer look at the relationships between women displayed in this first part of the *Nibelungenlied*. As is typical for its genre, exclusively female bonds are of minor importance in the *Nibelungenlied*. Consequently, women's relationships with women are only depicted when they are relevant to the actions of male characters. The dialogue between Kriemhild and her mother Uote in the first *âventiure*, for example, is related because its topic is Kriemhild's future marriage with Siegfried. At the same time, the scene shows that Uote, although a strong and well-respected woman, is well embedded in the patriarchal world, so that her bond with Kriemhild is of little help when it comes to the question of female independence. Ida and Carol Washington describe Uote correctly as a "strong mother figure" who is treated with respect by her children:

Uta's children treat her with respect and consult her when plans are made and decisions taken. A visit to Queen Uta is a necessary part of every arrival and departure at the castle, and messengers who report to Uta are often rewarded with rich gifts. When her children engage in tournaments or set out on journeys to distant lands, it is to Uta that they turn both for counsel and for the proper dress to indicate their wealth and rank, and it is she who gives directions to the serving women for the preparation of their garments.⁶⁰

Yet Washington and Washington also acknowledge that Uote subscribes to the patriarchal system and that she performs the traditional female gender role, symbolized by her view that

⁶⁰Ida H. Washington and Carol E. Washington Tobol, "Kriemhild and Clytemnestra -- Sisters in Crime or Independent Women?" in *The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature*, ed. Cathy N. Davidson and E.M. Brone (New York: Frederick Ungar Publ., 1980), 15-16.

"the only way for a woman to attain happiness is through a man's affection."⁶¹ By rejecting Kriemhild's negative view of marriage, Uote takes on the role of the promoter of male interests and exploits her closer relationship with her daughter to re-enforce the thought system of male-dominated medieval society.⁶² Kathleen Barry regards this pattern of female behaviour as a result of "male identification," which leads women to internalize "the values of the colonizer, and actively participate in carrying out the colonization of one's self and one's sex."⁶³

Much less harmonious, but of special importance, is the relationship between Kriemhild and Brünhild, since the open conflict between these two women in the 14th *âventiure* is usually regarded as the reason for the eventual destruction of the bond between Siegfried and Gunther and for Siegfried's death.⁶⁴ The first encounter between Brünhild and Kriemhild, in stanzas 587-589, is merely part of a formal ritual celebrated during the welcome ceremony for Brünhild and reveals little about the two women's feelings for each other. However, when the male observers in this scene make a detailed comparison of the two

⁶¹Ibid., 16.

⁶²This pattern may also be found in other examples of Middle High German literature. See Ann Marie Rasmussen, "Bist du begehrt, so bist du wert: Magische und höfische Mitgift für die Töchter," in *Mütter-Töchter-Frauen: Weiblichkeitsbilder in der Literatur*, ed. Helga Kraft and Elke Liebs (Stuttgart, Weimar: Metzler, 1993), 7-33 and Ann Marie Rasmussen, *Mothers and Daughters in Medieval German Literature* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse UP, 1997). Rasmussen discusses among other things dialogues between mother and daughter in *Die Winsbeckin*, Gottfried von Straßburg's *Tristan*, Neidhart's poems and some MHG *maeren*.

⁶³Kathleen Barry, *Female Sexual Slavery* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1979), 172.

⁶⁴This picture of "woman as riot" bears testimony to the powerful medieval notion on the inherent dangers of a woman's speech. On female verbal transgressions and the idea of "woman as riot," see Bloch, 13-35.

queens' beauty, they support Frakes's assumption that "female solidarity is all but absent from the *Nibelungenlied*, since the culture encourages competition rather than cooperation among represented females."⁶⁵ For the same reason, it is not clear whether the concern that Brünhild later shows about the appropriateness of Kriemhild's marriage to the alleged vassal Siegfried is motivated by female solidarity with another woman or by an interest in finding out more about the nature of the male bond between Siegfried and Gunther. Yet Brünhild seems to know instinctively that the key to the question of her defeat in the games lies in the bonding between the two heroes, and she tries to undermine this bond for the first time on her wedding night with Gunther, when she refuses to consummate their marriage as long as Gunther does not explain the nature of his relationship with Siegfried. As already pointed out, for Gunther male bonding proves to be stronger than the force, or lure, of a harmonious relationship with his wife, and Brünhild has to wait for over ten years before finding another opportunity to investigate the matter in which she is so interested.

In the meantime, Siegfried takes his young wife to his own kingdom in Xanten, though not before exchanging vows of mutual solidarity with his new kin in Burgundy, and receiving--apart from their sister--also a share of their wealth. The process of creating a friendly bond between the two kingdoms is now complete. A little later, their union is further strengthened by the exchange of names, when both Kriemhild and Brünhild fulfil the second part of their female duties by producing legitimate male heirs, both of whom are called after their respective uncle, Siegfried and Gunther.

The twelfth *âventiure* relates how Brünhild, whose suspicions concerning the

⁶⁵Frakes, 49.

relationship between the two heroes have become more serious due to Siegfried's continuous absence from Gunther's court, attempts to convince her husband to invite Siegfried and his wife to Burgundy, and thereby pretends an ardent desire to see her sister-in-law Kriemhild again. What this scene insinuates, however, is that there is no genuine bond between the two queens, and that a woman's destructive forces may be directed not only against male bonds, but also against other women. This impression becomes still stronger during the celebrated argument between Kriemhild and Brünhild in the 14th *âventiure*. Here again, the corollary to male homosocial bonding is female competition. Yet, while the women may verbally play off their husbands against each other, the husbands themselves demonstrate utmost male solidarity in word as well as in deed. Gunther spares Siegfried the oath (or, in other interpretations, he accepts his oath) that he never told his wife about Brünhild's wedding-night. Siegfried in return punishes his wife for her indiscretion. By relinquishing his right to publicly investigate the allegations made about his wife's sexual integrity, Gunther fails to restore her honour in public, thereby hurting her deeply. This scene clearly demonstrates that for both Siegfried and Gunther the relationship with their wives is subordinate to their mutual bond:

"Man sol sô vrouwen ziehen," sprach Siegfried der degen,
 "daz si üppeclîche sprüche lâzen under wegen.
 verbiut ez dînem wîbe, der mînen tuo ich sam.
 ir grôzen ungefüege ich mich wærlîche scham."

Nibelungenlied, stanza 862

["Women should be trained to avoid irresponsible chatter," continued

Siegfried. "Forbid your wife to indulge in it, and I shall do the same with mine. I am truly ashamed at her unseemly behaviour."]⁶⁶

The quarrel scene between Kriemhild and Brünhild puts an end not only to Brünhild's attempts to find out more about Siegfried's and Gunther's bond, but also to the bond itself. Although Gunther may regard the matter as finished, his vassals (and among them especially Hagen) are not satisfied with the suspiciously easy solution of the conflict between Kriemhild and Brünhild. And even though Hagen might have more reasons for killing Siegfried than solely to avenge Brünhild's humiliation, the quarrel between the women, and Brünhild's insult, provide him with an excuse for his subsequent actions. Moreover, the fact that Gunther does nothing to prevent Hagen from killing Siegfried might suggest that, despite the harmony that the two heroes have demonstrated in front of their wives and the court, their relationship has nevertheless been weakened by the women's argument. Hagen exploits this weakness, and by destroying Siegfried he eliminates a man whom he regards as a *gouch* (867), a cuckoo, who will eventually kill all other birds in the nest--to follow Mahlendorf and Tobin's interpretation of this line.⁶⁷ Hagen, who is apparently unaware of the secret between Siegfried and Gunther, wants to protect rather than hurt the system of male bonding by killing a man who in his eyes has tarnished this bond by insulting Gunther's wife. While the quarrel between the two queens is depicted as selfish and destructive, motivated by feminine vanity on Kriemhild's part and the wish to undermine male bonding on Brünhild's part, Hagen's

⁶⁶*The Nibelungenlied*, trans. Hatto, 116.

⁶⁷Ursula R. Mahlendorf and Frank J. Tobin, "Hagen: A Reappraisal," *Monatshefte* 63 (1971): 131.

murder of Siegfried is depicted as unselfish and constructive, performed to protect the system of male alliances underlying the power structures of the Burgundian court.

The *Nibelungenlied* successfully demonstrates that neither male-female nor female-female relationships have the constructive power of male homosocial bonding, as symbolized by Siegfried and Gunther, who through their personal alliance connect two kingdoms in mutual friendship. Relationships between the two genders are depicted either as fraught with conflict, as in the case of Gunther and Brünhild, or as endangering male bonds due to too much intimacy between man and woman, as exemplified by Siegfried's giving Brünhild's ring and girdle to Kriemhild. Relationships between women, if they are not successfully utilized for the purpose of patriarchy, like the one between Uote and her daughter Kriemhild, are regarded as potentially dangerous, capable of destroying even the strongest male bond. Although women and relationships including women are necessary for the system of male homosocial bonding, as demonstrated by the bond between Gunther and Siegfried, they may also create forces strong enough to destroy the system they have helped to establish. The fear that speaks out of the cruel punishment of Amicus's wife in the story of "Amicus und Amelius" in *Der Große Seelentrost* has turned into reality in the dangerous bond between Kriemhild and Brünhild in the *Nibelungenlied*.

b) *Kudrun*

As the epic *Kudrun*⁶⁸ shows, *raptus* serves as one of the most extreme forms of the male exchange of women. As a medieval legal term, *raptus* describes two different crimes: first, the forcible abduction of a daughter from her father's house, and secondly, a man's forced sexual intercourse with a woman, i.e. "rape" in the modern meaning of the word. Since more often than not the ultimate purpose of abduction was the marriage between the abductor and the abducted woman, the two meanings of *raptus* often overlapped. The abductor seized the prospective bride against her father's will (and often, but not always, against her own will) either to marry her himself or to deliver her to her future husband. In early Roman law, *raptus* in both its meanings, as forcible abduction and as forced sexual intercourse, was regarded as a crime of property against the victim's legal guardian, her father or husband, rather than a crime against the personal integrity of the victim herself. This means that the violated party was not the woman but her family. Under later Roman and Germanic laws, *raptus* became a public crime which was punished severely: when convicted, the *raptor* would face the death penalty or at least some kind of mutilation, often castration. Considerably lighter penalties were imposed by medieval canon law. The medieval Church's attitude toward the crime of *raptus* was shaped by Gratian's *Decretum* (of 1140) and his re-definition of the legal term of *raptus*. Moreover, medieval canon law granted that a man guilty of *raptus* could escape death

⁶⁸*Kudrun*, ed. Karl Bartsch, 5th ed. (Wiesbaden: Brockhaus, 1965). All quotations are from this edition.

or mutilation by seeking the sanctuary of a church.⁶⁹

Despite the existence of medieval laws on *raptus*, it was not unusual for the family of the victim to avenge themselves on the presumed offender without initiating a judicial process. Literary examples demonstrate that the abductor had to be, and usually was, well aware of the fact that he had to reckon with retaliation from his victim's family. The woman's family either managed to wrench the victim from the abductor's hands, or, alternatively, the two parties agreed on a peaceful settlement. In the latter case the victim's family usually gave their formal consent to the marriage and let their daughter stay with the abductor. Both kinds of outcome are depicted in *Kudrun*.

The epic *Kudrun* can be divided into three parts, each of which revolves around a story of abduction. Only the two latter parts of *Kudrun*, however, deal with *raptus* in the legal sense of the word. The second part (stanzas 204-562) features Hagen's daughter Hilde as the willing object of a simulated abduction, arranged to release her from the jealous grip of her over-possessive father and to unite her with her future husband, King Hetel of the Hegelings. The third part of the epic (stanzas 563-1705) offers the most dramatic depiction of an abduction. It describes the forced abduction of Kudrun, daughter of Hilde, by Hartmuot, Prince of the Normans. After several years of imprisonment and torture, Kudrun is finally rescued by her family and manages to establish peace between the Hegelings and the Normans.

Abducting a woman with her consent, i.e. "staging" or faking an abduction, seems to have been a relatively common strategy in the Middle Ages. How seriously Roman law took

⁶⁹See especially Brundage, "Rape and Seduction in the Medieval Canon Law," 141-158.

a woman's attempt to exert an active influence on her own fate may be seen from Constantine's revision of the law on *raptus*, according to which a woman who consented to her own abduction was liable to the death penalty. And indeed, a "staged" abduction could be used as a powerful tool to finally convince a reluctant father to agree to the marriage between his daughter and a suitor of whom he did not approve. The story of Hilde presents the reader with a variation of this topic. The princess Hilde, although of marriageable age and of great beauty, is still unmarried, because her father Hagen habitually has all her suitors killed. For this reason, King Hetel of the Hegelings has to resort to a ruse (MHG *list*) in order to marry Hilde. He sends messengers to Hagen, who pose as rich merchants and refugees from Hetel's kingdom. Hagen grants them refuge, and thus makes it possible for Hetel's envoys to secretly convince Hilde of their king's qualities as a prospective husband. Hilde, lured by the prospect of escaping the loving but tyrannical grip of her father and of becoming the wife of a powerful king, agrees to the plan of a "staged" abduction. The plan proves successful: although Hagen immediately sets off in pursuit of the abductors, causing a great battle and costing the lives of many warriors on both sides, Hilde finally manages to arrange a peaceful settlement between the two families.

Hagen's unwillingness to participate in the exchange of women, symbolized by his killing of Hilde's suitors, forces Hetel to resort to extreme measures. Instead of a peaceful exchange of a woman between two men we now find a forced exchange, based on a combination of ruse and of physical and military violence. Significant about this instance of traffic in women is the fact that the female object of the exchange, Hilde, seems to have more influence on her own fate than many other women who change hands between men, since it

is Hilde's consent that makes the *raptus* possible in the first place. However, Hilde's power to participate in her own exchange soon reveals itself as destructive. As the text relates in detail, Hilde willingly accepts responsibility for the tragic outcome of her own abduction and castigates herself for her participation in this act of *raptus*. Her feeling of guilt is so strong that after the battle she does not even dare to approach her father, since she blames herself for his suffering. Hilde's interpretation of the events is challenged neither by the other characters nor by the narrator, which leaves the audience with the impression that in this forced exchange of a woman it is indeed the exchanged woman herself who turns out to be the culprit, while the male parties are exonerated. Yet it should not be overlooked that, despite the suffering and losses on both sides, the *raptus* of Hilde ultimately does create homosocial/political bonds between two male leaders. Despite the immediate negative consequences of Hilde's abduction, for which the victim herself is blamed, there are in the end positive consequences for the male participants. *Raptus* may seem, and actually be, disruptive on the surface, yet on a deeper level Elizabeth Robertson's definition of rape as "fundamental to the smooth operations of society" holds true also for this text.

A second example from the same text shows the extent to which rape may function as an (openly discussed) political means, which is judged not in its own right, but according to the end it serves. The forcible abduction, imprisonment and torture of Kudrun, daughter of Hilde and Hetel of the Hegelings, by Hartmuot, Prince of the Normans, is meant to serve as the basis of a political bond between the Normans and the Hegelings. And again there is the attempt to exonerate the male participants. The text obscures the power-relationship between male abductor and female victim by assigning the cruellest role in the story to a woman. It is

the "she-devil" Gerlint, the mother of Kudrun's abductor Hartmuot, who acts as Kudrun's torturer. *Kudrun* not only conjures up images of forced coitus without depicting any sexual act, but the text skilfully shifts the blame for the act from man to woman, thus presenting rape as an act which might, at least to a certain degree, be performed by one woman on another.

Almost from her first appearance in the story, Gerlint is discredited as a negative, at times even fiendish force by the narrator. She is referred to alternately as "Gerlint, the she-devil" or even "Gerlint the old she-devil," "Gerlint, the old she-wolf" and "Gerlint, the evil one." The fact that she acts as the major force behind Hartmuot's attempts to win Kudrun as his wife, does not improve her reputation in the eyes of the narrator. It is Gerlint who appears as the main instigator in the abduction of Kudrun, after Hartmuot's wooing has twice been unsuccessful. When Hartmuot decides to take by force what is refused to him peacefully, he does so partly in order to satisfy his mother's wish for revenge for what Gerlint perceives as a major humiliation, namely that Hartmuot has been rejected on grounds of his inferior social standing. Gerlint's active role in the abduction of Kudrun is only highlighted by Hartmuot's general weakness and passivity. Hartmuot is not only unable to win Kudrun's consent to the marriage even after she is, quite literally, in his hands, but he is equally incapable of standing up to his mother. Yet Hartmuot's weakness of character, graceless and "unmanly" though it may seem at first glance, ultimately saves him from the greater disgrace of being the tormentor and rapist of a helpless and imprisoned woman. The text, eager to keep Hartmuot free from all blame for Kudrun's fate at the hands of the Normans, depicts Gerlint as the primary culprit, strong enough to thwart her son's feeble attempts to secure Kudrun a decent

treatment. Furthermore, the text repeatedly stresses Hartmuot's ignorance of what is going on between his mother and his future wife. In the fourteen years that Kudrun is held prisoner, Hartmuot is depicted as absent from his country most of the time, and he is thus absolved from any direct responsibility for his prisoner's suffering. Despite Gerlint's claim that her actions serve first and foremost the well-being of her son, the reader is left with the feeling that what is going on between Gerlint and Kudrun is primarily a private business between the two women. Gerlint's maltreatment of Kudrun is not only meant to point to the evil propensities of the "she-devil" Gerlint, but it furthermore suggests how severely power can be abused when exclusively in the hands of a woman who is beyond the control of male authorities.

As in the *Nibelungenlied*, the act of rape is committed by two agents: Gerlint fulfils the role of Kudrun's tormentor, determined to break her victim's resistance with the help of mental and physical torture; and Hartmuot is meant to enjoy the "fruit" of his mother's work, namely sexual intercourse with Kudrun. Gerlint's acting as the "token torturer"⁷⁰ in lieu of her son has specific legal reasons, which are explicitly discussed in the text. Perversely, the discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of a potential rape takes place between Hartmuot and Kudrun, i.e. between the potential rapist and his intended victim:

Dô sprach von Ormanîe Hartmuot daz kint:

"ir wizzet daz wol, Kûdrûn, daz mîn eigen sint

diu lant und die bürge und ouch <al> die liute.

wer hienge mich dar umbe, ob ich iuch gewünne mir ze einer briute?"

⁷⁰Daly, 335.

Kudrun, stanza 1029

[*Then Hartmuot, the young Prince of the Normans said: "You know well enough, Kudrun, that the land and the castles and all the people here are my own. Who would take me to the gallows if I simply took you as my bed-fellow?"*]

Hartmuot's allusion to the gallows points to his familiarity with Roman or Germanic law and their harsh penalties for *raptus*. Yet even though Hartmuot places himself above any worldly law, forced sexual intercourse with Kudrun would work against his own interests: in order to establish strong homosocial/political bonds with Kudrun's more powerful family, Hartmuot is dependent on Kudrun's consent to have sexual intercourse--no matter how this "consent" is achieved. In her words in stanza 1030, Kudrun is quick to point this out, and she thereby reveals Hartmuot's threat for what it is, a mere bluff: "ez spræhen ander fürsten, sô si des hôrten mære, / daz daz Hagenen künne in Hartmuotes lande kebese wære" [... and all the other lords would say that one of Hagen's family was a mistress in Hartmuot's kingdom].

Despite Gerlint's further attempts to break Kudrun's resistance and to prepare her for "consensual" sexual intercourse with Hartmuot, Kudrun's resolve remains unshaken. The later rescue of Kudrun renders the intended marriage with Hartmuot impossible. Nevertheless, the planned political alliance between the Normans and the Hegelings does take place. It is the exchange of two other women, namely Kudrun's loyal lady-in-waiting Hildburc and Hartmuot's sister Ortrun, that assures a strong political bond between the two kingdoms: Hildburc takes Kudrun's place as Hartmuot's royal wife, while Ortrun later marries Kudrun's brother Ortwin. Negative though the *raptus* of Hilde and Kudrun might seem at first

glance, it nevertheless initiates male homosocial bonds through the bonds of heterosexual marriage. At the same time, the text's strategy of shifting a major part of the blame for *raptus* to a woman assures the audience that the violence against women intrinsic in the act of *raptus* is to a certain degree "self-afflicted." I would argue that the women in the negotiation of power played out in the act of *raptus* are depicted as stronger than they actually are: either because they consent with their own "staged" abduction, like Hilde, or because they take on the highly visible role of the token torturer who forces another woman into the bed of an (allegedly ignorant) man, as Gerlint does with Kudrun.

c) Hartmann von Aue: *Iwein*

Hartmann von Aue's *Iwein*⁷¹ offers an illustration of the possible negative consequences of male homosocial bonding for its participants. The text presents the reader with an even greater variety of male bonds than *Der Große Seelentrost* and the *Nibelungenlied*. While the latter two concentrate on the inherent strength of male bonding and on the dangers this concept is confronted with especially through female intervention, *Iwein* also exposes the force that these bonds can exert over their male participants, thereby sometimes turning them into the victims of their own male ethic. Moreover, *Iwein* points to the inherent material basis

⁷¹Hartmann von Aue, *Iwein*, ed. G.F. Benecke and K. Lachmann, 7th edition, revised by Ludwig Wolff, vol. 1: *Text* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1968). All quotations from *Iwein* are taken from this edition.

of male homosocial bonds while at the same time confronting the reader with a poignant description of the innate instability of exclusively female relationships--a feature that I have already demonstrated in the bond between Kriemhild and her mother Uote, as well as in that between Kriemhild and Brünhild in the *Nibelungenlied*.

Verses 4526-4726 of Hartmann's *Iwein* describe what might be regarded as a prime example of male bonding turned against itself, or in this case, against its most important symbol in medieval Arthurian romance, the figure of King Artus. Artus's legendary *milte* und *vrümekeit*, symbolized by his promise never to deny a guest any wish, is severely tested when one day a foreign knight appears at his court and demands to be guaranteed whatever he might ask for. When Artus refuses, the knight leaves the court angrily, claiming that the king does not live up to his own reputation and casting doubts on his honour (*êre*). At this point the pressure of male bonding becomes visible, illustrated by Artus's knights reproaching the king for his behaviour:

sî sprâchen mit einem munde
 'herre, ir habet missetân,
 welt ir den rîter alsus lân.
 wem habt ir ouch iht verseit?
 lât ez an sîne hövescheit.
 er gelîchet sich wol einem man
 der betelîchen biten kan.
 scheidet er von hinnen
 mit selhen unminnen,

ern gesprichet nimmer mêre
dehein iuwer êre.'

Iwein, v. 4568-4578

*[They spoke with one voice: "My lord, you have acted improperly if you intend to let the knight depart like this. Have you ever denied anything to anyone before? Grant it, trusting in his courtliness. He appears to be a man who knows how to make reasonable requests. If he leaves here with such bitterness he will never again say anything to your credit."]*⁷²

King Artus, the centre of the Arthurian Round Table, cannot afford to lose his honour in the eyes of the brotherhood he himself represents, medieval knighthood. Therefore he is forced to yield to the pressure exerted over him by the "one voice" of male homosocial bonding: he finally puts an end to the knight's slanders by granting him whatever wish he might have, thereby relying on his followers' belief that the foreign knight will remain within the limits of reason. The knight's wish, however, turns out to be the most unreasonable possible, namely to be permitted to take with him Artus's own wife, Queen Ginover. With this wish the knight violates the unwritten code of honour that underlies male bonding (a violation made possible by his status as a foreigner at the court), and at the same time he forces Artus to concede if he wants to keep intact the ideal of a brotherhood of knights based on the ideals of *triuwe* and *êre*. Male homosocial bonding demands the exchange of a woman in order to maintain itself. Although the pressure exerted on Artus should not be underestimated, I do not agree with the

⁷²Hartmann von Aue, *Iwein*, ed. and trans. Patrick M. McConeghy, Garland Library of Medieval Literature 19 (New York and London: Garland Publ., 1984), 189.

common description of this episode as *Raub* [robbery],⁷³ but would rather regard it as an example of male homosocial bonding taken to its logical extreme. In contrast to the merchant of Egypt in *Der Große Seelentrost*, who goes to a similar extreme by giving his own bride to his friend, King Artus is *tricked* into the sacrifice of his wife through the cynical exploitation of the principles of male bonding that he symbolizes. What is depicted in *Iwein* is not *raptus*, but the forced handing-over of Artus's wife by himself. The shame Artus experiences finds its reason not only in the loss of his wife as an acknowledged part of his property, but also in the knowledge of having been defeated with his own weapons.

The status of the queen as merely a token in the interaction between men reveals itself immediately after Artus, albeit grudgingly, grants the foreign knight his wish. As it soon turns out, the latter is not at all interested in the queen as a person (or as a source of his personal pleasure), but regards her primarily as a means to create a hostile relationship with Artus: before leaving the court with the distressed lady the knight challenges Artus and his followers to chase him and win the lady back in a duel, thereby even promising not to avoid any confrontation. Eve Sedgwick's definition of "cuckolding" as "a sexual act, performed on a man, by another man"⁷⁴ finds its illustration in the strong relationship between Artus and the knight, especially given the latter's personal disinterest in the Queen. This episode shows how heterosexual love can serve the interests of homosocial bonds.

The eagerness of Artus's knights to risk their lives for Queen Ginover has to be

⁷³See for example Karl-Friedrich O. Kraft, *Iweins Triuwe: Zu Ethos und Form der Aventiurenfolge in Hartmanns "Iwein,"* Amsterdamer Publikationen zur Sprache und Literatur 42 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1979), 112-120.

⁷⁴Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 49.

regarded as a positive result of the same system of male bonding in the name of which the Queen had to be sacrificed in the first place. Sir Kei's adamant threat against the foreign intruder may stand as an example for the relationship of *triuwe* between Artus and the knights of his Round Table:

dô sprach der herre Kei
 'in beschirmt der tiuvel noch got,
 der uns disen grôzen spot
 an mîner vrouwen hât getân,
 ezn müez im an sîn êre gân.
 ich bin truhsæze hie ze hûs,
 unde ez hât der küneec Artûs
 verschuldet um mich harte wol
 daz ich gerne ledegen sol
 mîne vrouwen sîn wîp.'

Iwein, 4634-4643

[Then Sir Keii said, 'Unless God or the Devil protects this man who has done us the great insult through my lady, he will pay with his honor. I am the steward here at court and I most certainly owe it to King Arthur to free my lady, his wife.]⁷⁵

The formulation "der *uns* disen grôzen spot / an mîner vrouwen hât getân" emphasizes the Queen's primary function as a means by which one man, the foreign knight, inflicts insult and

⁷⁵Hartmann von Aue, *Iwein*, trans. McConeghy, 191-193.

pain on another, namely Artus, and through the latter indirectly also on Artus's "men." Not only Artus himself, but the knights of the Round Table perceive themselves as cuckolds.⁷⁶ As Kraft confirms, "nicht so sehr die Not der Königin, als vielmehr der "spot" des Hofes, die eigene Schande, [wird] als größtes Unheil empfunden." [It is not so much the Queen's distress as the ridicule of the court, their own shame, that is felt as the greatest misery.] At the same time, Keii's description of Ginover as "mine vrouwen sin wip" points to the Queen's role as a token of exchange between Artus and his knights--even though the exchange is in this case only of a symbolic nature. By allowing his knights to "participate" in his rights over the Queen, expressed through Keii's use of the possessive pronoun "mîne" as a reflection of Artus's "sîn," the person of the Queen is used to strengthen the formal bond of *triuwe* between Artus and his knights, and at the same time the bond between the knights themselves. For this reason, it seems only consistent that the knights attempt everything in their power to regain the token and symbol of their mutual bond and of their relationship to their King. Duby's deliberations on the nature of the triangular relationship between a young knight, his lady and his lord, can be transferred to the relationship between King Artus's knights, King Artus himself, and his wife, Queen Ginover:

It is legitimate to wonder whether, in this triangular relationship between the 'young man', the lady and the lord, the major vector which, openly, goes from the young lover towards the lady, does not indeed rebound off the lady herself so as to reach the third person--its true goal--and even whether it does not

⁷⁶Kraft, 116-117.

project towards him without detour.⁷⁷

Even though in *Iwein* the Queen does not function as a *Minnedame* in the traditional meaning of the word, Duby's definition proves useful. As becomes obvious, in this text, too, the true goal of the knights' desire is the King himself, whereas the King's wife merely serves as the mediator of the homosocial desires that connect Artus and the members of his Round Table.

Knighly combat is also the source of the sorrow of the thirty courtly ladies Iwein finds literally reduced to slaves and imprisoned in a foreign castle. Forced to spend their time with the spinning and weaving of textiles, and without any hope of regaining their freedom, these ladies embody utter human misery. The special cruelty of the ladies' situation is highlighted by the contrast between their natural nobility, beauty and youth, and their present degraded state:

in galt ir arbeit niht mê
 wan daz in zallen zîten wê
 von hunger und von durste was
 und daz in kûme genas
 der lîp der in doch nâch gesweich.
 sî wâren mager unde bleich
 sî lîten grôzen unrât
 an dem lîbe und an der wât.

Iwein, v. 6207-6214

⁷⁷Georges Duby, *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages*, trans. Jane Dunnett (Chicago: Polity Press, 1994), 62.

*[The sole reward for their labor was the constant pain of hunger and thirst and such physical exhaustion that they were barely able to keep alive. They were emaciated and pale, suffering from a lack of food and clothing].*⁷⁸

When asked for the reason for their wretched state, the ladies complain to Iwein that they are held hostage, given to the owner of the castle in exchange for the life of their lord, who was unfortunate enough to lose a fight against two giants into which he was forced by the castle's owner. This episode not only depicts women as objects of exchange between men, but points to the degree to which a woman's status in medieval romance is dependent on the status of the male authority around which her life revolves. The loss of a knight's honour automatically results in the degradation of the women in his possession, and courtly ladies are transformed into slaves with no more privilege than any peasant woman in medieval society. The courtly lady of medieval society is "man-made" in the true sense of the word. Moreover, the example of the imprisoned slaves demonstrates that women may even have a two-fold material value: they can not only be turned into commodities themselves, but they can even be forced to produce commodities, such as fabrics, which then go back into the process of commercial exchange mostly between men. Although the ladies whom Iwein encounters have not lost their inner nobility (symbolized by their shame about their degradation), they have nevertheless been deprived of their noble status in society--a status which, as the further development of the story demonstrates, can only be regained for them by a man.

But the lord of the castle, whom Iwein after some search finds in a peaceful conversation with his wife and daughter, proves to be under a certain pressure himself. As he

⁷⁸*Iwein*, trans. McConeghy, 255-257.

points out to Iwein, he is not able to marry off his daughter until the two giants are defeated, and he eagerly seizes the opportunity to send another knight against his adversaries, promising Iwein not only his daughter, but his land after his death. In this case a woman is offered not for material exploitation like the wretched ladies, but in the more conventional, "romanticized" way for male (sexual) consummation. The woman's role as a "prize" for the successful accomplishment of a deed is nevertheless brutally highlighted when Iwein feigns fear and claims that no woman could constitute a sufficient reward for the dangers of such an undertaking:

ouch enwil ich niemer mînen lîp
 gewâgen umbe dehein wîp
 sô gar ûz der mâze
 daz ich mich slahen lâze
 sô lasterlîchen âne wer

Iwein, v. 6631-35

*[Nor will I ever risk my life for any woman at such immeasurable odds, and let myself be killed shamefully with no means of defense.]*⁷⁹

Iwein pretends that his host's daughter is not worth his trouble--a clear indicator of a mode of measurement employed in the assessment of a woman, or in this case, of the woman's market value. Roberta Krueger's comment on the figure of the young daughter in Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain* holds true also for her German counterpart:

Throughout this altercation between the two men, the daughter's opinion on

⁷⁹*Iwein*, trans. McConeghy, 273.

the matter is never solicited. The young girl who was actively reading a romance aloud to her parents here becomes the passive object of verbal exchange between two knights seeking honor.⁸⁰

In the same article, Krueger also remarks on the most important, and most perfectly obscured, act of exchange portrayed in Chretien's *Yvain*, namely that of Queen Laudine, who after the death of her husband is seduced or tricked into marriage with Yvain by her trusted female servant and counselor, Lunete. Hartmann's *Iwein* offers a similar scene, which also shows Lunete's ambivalent position between Iwein, whom she wants to reward for a knightly service he had performed for her, and Laudine, to whom she is bound by the privileged position of trust. Since it is Iwein who has killed Laudine's husband in battle, and since Laudine is in dire need of a new protector of the magic fountain, Lunete's advice that Laudine should marry the only knight who has proved to be superior to her late husband, namely his killer, turns out to be less cynical than might at first appear. More cynical, however, is the underlying reason for Lunete's advice that Laudine should marry Iwein, advice that is, as Krueger points out, motivated less by genuine interest in Laudine's well-being than by Lunete's bond of gratitude to Iwein. In the French as well as in the German version of the romance, I would argue, with Krueger, that "Lunete, who has promised to Yvain whatever he needs [...] serves first of all Yvain and the system of knightly honor when she convinces Laudine to marry the man who has killed her husband."⁸¹ It might be disputed, though, in

⁸⁰Roberta L. Krueger, "Love, Honor, and the Exchange of Women in *Yvain*: Some Remarks on the Female Reader," *Romance Notes* 25 (1984/85): 313.

⁸¹Krueger, 308.

how far Lunete here, as Krueger argues, really inhabits the power-position to act "as a relative who hands a daughter or sister over for marriage."⁸² I would claim that Lunete functions only as a mediator who helps handing over the dead knight's property to Iwein. If one regards Laudine as part of her husband's possessions, it is scarcely surprising that she has to be passed on to the knight who has defeated him. This act of exchange, however, is obscured by the built-in love-story between Iwein and Laudine, or rather by Iwein's love for Laudine, triggered by the voyeuristic pleasures of peeping through a little window at the lamenting widow.⁸³ Laudine's sudden outburst of love, after she has been convinced to marry the unknown knight who has slain her husband, has disturbed not only many critics of this work but also Hartmann himself⁸⁴, and seems scarcely convincing in the context of the story.

I would argue that Lunete's intervention shows not only how the exchange of women works even when one of the male exchange partners is dead and the other incapable of acting,

⁸²Ibid., 309.

⁸³On this rather disturbing description of the awakening of love, see also John Margetts, "The Representation of Female Attractiveness in the Works of Hartmann von Aue with Special Reference to *Der arme Heinrich*," in *Hartmann von Aue, Changing Perspectives: London Hartmann Symposium 1985*, ed. Timothy McFarland and Silvia Ranawake (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1988), 206: "In *Iwein* Laudine tears her dress in grief standing at the open coffin of her dead husband. The sight of this distress inflames the concealed Iwein and Yvain, but only in *Iwein* is mention made of Laudine's skin shining through the tears in her clothing. This example from *Iwein* is particularly interesting because the sexual arousal of Iwein is thus heralded by a situation in which he is the prisoner figure of a woman whose physical abuse of herself triggers in him the awakening of 'minne.'" In a similar vein, in *Der arme Heinrich* it is less the objectification and sacrifice of the peasant girl that triggers Heinrich's sympathy and (bad) conscience, than the sight of the girl's bound and naked body on the sacrificial table.

⁸⁴See for example Christoph Cormeau and Wilhelm Störmer, *Hartmann von Aue, Epoche, Werk, Wirkung* (München: Beck, 1985), 207, who point out Hartmann's specific depiction of Laudine compared to Chretien.

but also that successful male bonding often relies on the absence or disruption of female bonds. As the relationship between Kriemhild and her mother Uote in the *Nibelungenlied* has already demonstrated, women often fulfil the role of the helper when it comes to preparing other women for exchange. Lunete's role is not much different from Uote's in that she actively supports the exchange of a woman between two men, thereby exploiting her own relationship of trust with the other woman.

This fragility of female bonds as compared to male bonds may also be seen in another episode depicted in *Iwein*. When, in verses 5625-5662, the knight *von dem Swarzen dorne* dies, his two daughters immediately start a fight over the inheritance, thus demonstrating the fragility of women's bonds, especially if the women are deprived of male authority, symbolized by their father. The daughters, left to their own devices, through their struggle point not only to their inability to manage financial matters, but also to their need of a male authority-figure to organize their lives. In this story Iwein and (unknown to Iwein) his friend Gawein take the matter of these two sisters in hand by each promising to fight a duel on behalf of one of them. The strength of male homosocial bonding is highlighted when Iwein and Gawein abandon their duel after they have established each other's identity, thus showing that male bonds cannot be damaged or destroyed just because of two noblewomen. The knights' loyalty to the ladies whose rights they have promised to represent is overridden by their male loyalty to each other. Thus this scene proves not only the superiority of male homosocial bonding over male-female bonds, but also women's inability to establish strong bonds with one another. If one also considers that it is actually the duel for the two sisters' rights that has brought Iwein and Gawein together again after a long separation, this scene

shows that even here, as in the episode between Iwein, Lunete and Laudine, disrupted female bonds serve to create or re-enforce male homosocial bonding. The moral of this episode of the sisters *von dem Swarzen Dorne* may thus be formulated as follows: while two sisters, although tied by nature by the bonds of blood, fight each other, two spiritual brothers, bound only by the ties of male homosocial bonding, stand by each other despite all obstacles.

3. "... den fremden an ze sehene": "frouwen schouwen" and Male Interaction

Adrienne Rich, in her discussion of "the methods by which male power is manifested and maintained,"⁸⁵ points to a number of ways in which women are objectified and exploited in male transactions:

...to use them as objects in male transactions

[use of women as "gifts," bride-price; pimping, arranged marriage; use of women as entertainers to facilitate male deals, for example, wife-hostess, cocktail waitress required to dress for male sexual titillation, call girls, "bunnies," geisha, kisaeng prostitutes, secretaries]...⁸⁶

⁸⁵Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Ann B. Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 185.

⁸⁶Ibid., 184.

The process of exchanging women through marriage is probably the most common, and most socially acceptable, of these transactions, but there are others, such as for example business transactions, where women find themselves in the role of the "wife-hostess." As a wife-hostess a woman is exchanged not in a literal, physical sense, but symbolically: dressed up on the occasion of an important business meeting, she serves as a means of male visual pleasure and thereby helps facilitate a deal. By offering his wife to his business partner as an object of his visual pleasure, the husband of the wife-hostess symbolically hands her over to the other man for "sexual usage" in the hope of receiving business profits in return.

But the practice of exploiting women for male visual pleasure is no invention of modern "capitalistic" times. As the following examination of the medieval German practice of "frouwen schouwen" ("watching ladies" or "looking at/taking note of the ladies") demonstrates, medieval men were well aware of the societal and material value a beautiful woman could have. Men's strategy of subjecting the women in their power to the gaze of other, often strictly selected, men in order to achieve some gain is a typical feature of Middle High German literature. A.T. Hatto in his article "Vrouwen Schouwen" offers a detailed account of "frouwen schouwen" in Middle High German literature, where he mentions, among other instances, Ulrich von Zatzikhoven's *Lanzelet*, Ulrich von Liechtenstein's *Frauendienst*, Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Willehalm*, Gottfried von Straßburg's *Tristan*, Wirnt von Gravenberg's *Wigalois* and Der Stricker's *Daniel von dem blühenden Tale*.⁸⁷ The Middle High German formula "frouwen sehen lân" ("to present the ladies") gives testimony to the woman's role as passive object of male visual pleasure who *is* presented rather than

⁸⁷ A. T. Hatto, "Vrouwen Schouwen," *The Modern Language Review* 34 (1939): 40-49

presents herself. Not unlike in modern times, the ritual of "frouwen schouwen" or "vrouwen sehen" is usually embedded in a formal or festive occasion, most often the courtly feast with its emphasis on (theatrical) representation. As Hatto assures the reader, "the appearance of ladies at tournaments and festivities needs no documentation--the peculiar quality of tournaments and mediaeval court functions lay in their not being Spartan activities."⁸⁸

Although Hatto insists that "in general it can have been no lewd or prying custom which gained the mark of acceptance into language,"⁸⁹ to discuss a ritual like "frouwen schouwen" would be unthinkable without at least acknowledging Laura Mulvey's much quoted, and by now almost as much criticized, article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."⁹⁰ Based on Sigmund Freud's definition of *scopophilia* as "the erotic basis for the pleasure in looking at another person as an object,"⁹¹ Mulvey explains the relationship between the looking subject and the looked-at object in terms of the dichotomies active/passive and male/female. Her definition of the female part of society "as a signifier for the male other" accounts for the passive role Mulvey attributes to woman in the process of looking. Woman is "the silent image" onto which man imposes his "fantasies and obsessions"; she is "bearer, not maker, of meaning."⁹²

⁸⁸Ibid., 42.

⁸⁹Ibid., 40.

⁹⁰Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1993), 432-442.

⁹¹Ibid., 434.

⁹²Ibid., 433.

Mulvey's theory of the "male gaze" has not remained unchallenged in feminist film theory. Especially the fact that Mulvey neither finds a place for the female spectator nor discusses the possibility of the male body as an object of scopophilic pleasure has evoked much criticism. But Mulvey's approach becomes even more problematic if taken out of the context of Hollywood cinema. A.C. Spearing in his study *The Medieval Poet As Voyeur*⁹³ circumvents quite elegantly the general problems one is confronted with when attempting to analyze (medieval) literature on a psychoanalytical basis. Although the term "voyeur" in his title suggests a psychoanalytical approach, Spearing refuses to commit himself and, rather jokingly, defines his own relationship to "grand theory" as that of "a voyeur":

Though my approach is generally psychoanalytic, I have found it helpful to this project not to commit myself to any single theory, but to retain freedom of manoeuvre in deploying the large categories in terms of which its field is defined.⁹⁴

Although I disagree with some of Spearing's objections to the general usability of "grand theory," I tend to support his conclusion that the concept of the male gaze "cannot be transferred without modification from modern semiotics, psychoanalysis and film theory to the [medieval] texts discussed."⁹⁵ Despite these doubts about the usefulness of modern psychoanalytical theory for the discussion of medieval literature, however, and despite our

⁹³A.C. Spearing, *The Medieval Poet As Voyeur: Looking and Listening in Medieval Love-Narratives* (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1993).

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 2.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 25.

ignorance about the medieval texts' intentions, there is evidence that at least some of their readers do sense a sexual subtext to the depictions of "frouwen schouwen." The most emphatic example for such a reading is probably Joachim Fernau's *Disteln für Hagen*.⁹⁶ In his literary adaptation of the *Nibelungenlied*, Fernau makes use of terms such as "Blut in Wallung," "Erregung" and "Sinnenfreude" in order to ironically emphasize the knight's assumed sexual pleasure derived from the act of "frouwen spehen."

Be that as it may, the exact nature of the pleasure derived from the act of looking is of minor importance for my analysis of the symbolic exchange of women through the practice of "frouwen schouwen" and "frouwen sehen lân." As long as it can be assumed that the sight of beautiful ladies was regarded as a worthy "item" of exchange by those who were granted this pleasure, this practice is of importance for my discussion of the role of women in male-male transactions.

The detailed description of King Marke's annual courtly feast in Gottfried von Straßburg's *Tristan* (about 1210)⁹⁷ may serve as a first example of what I call the visual exchange of women. During these celebrations, Riwalin and Blanscheflur first set eyes on each other and begin their short and tragic love-story. Yet at the same time Marke's feast is a source of other, less serious pleasures for the eyes, as described in lines 612 to 622:

sus huob diu hôhgezît sich dô.
und swes der gerne sehende man

⁹⁶Joachim Fernau, *Disteln für Hagen: Bestandsaufnahme der deutschen Seele* (München, Berlin: Herbig, 1966).

⁹⁷Gottfried von Straßburg, *Tristan*, ed. and trans. Rüdiger Krohn, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1984). My quotations from the MHG *Tristan* are taken from this text.

ze sehene guoten muot gewan,
 daz lie diu state dâ wol geschehen;
 man sach dâ, swaz man wolte sehen:
 dise vuoren sehen vrouwen,
 jene ander tanzen schouwen;
 dise sâhen bûhurdieren,
 jene ander justieren.
 swâ zuo den man sîn wille truoc,
 des alles vand er dâ genuoc.

Tristan, 612-22

*[Such was the beginning of that festival. And if a man who loved a spectacle
 took a fancy to seeing anything, opportunity was there to indulge him. One
 saw what one wanted to see: some went to note the ladies, others to see
 dancing; some watched the bohort, others jousting. Whatever one fancied was
 found in abundance ...]*⁹⁸

In this description the active/passive and male/female dichotomies are clearly identifiable. Although Hatto in his translation of lines 621-622 chooses the gender-neutral subject "one," the Middle High German text leaves no doubt that it is only "der gerne sehende man" (v. 613) who at this feast may find in abundance the objects of his fancy. Women in this context appear only in the role of the looked-at object, and in addition to that are virtually immobile. As the passive objects of the "roaming" male gaze they have no function other than to display

⁹⁸Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, trans. A.T. Hatto (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 49.

their beautiful bodies. John Berger in his study *Ways of Seeing* puts this relationship between the active male spectator and the passive female object of the gaze very succinctly:

men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object--and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.⁹⁹

The powerlessness of the displayed women themselves becomes clear enough. And although Hatto insists on the reciprocity of the pleasure when he claims that "the ladies did not disapprove of this quizzing, but returned the compliment by appearing in their best array,"¹⁰⁰ one should not overlook the fact that medieval descriptions of female behaviour are as much of male origin as the described ladies themselves, and might very well express expected and desired female attitudes.

Although in the passage cited from Gottfried's *Tristan* no explicit reason is given for the presentation of the court's noblewomen, this presentation nevertheless fulfils an important function in the structure of exchange. As an acknowledged part of medieval courtly representation, the beauties and charms of "his" courtly ladies further the ruler's reputation and, quite literally, gain him honour in the eyes of his admiring guests. As Lambertus Okken points out in his comment on the above cited line 617 of *Tristan*, "in einer Herrenwelt, die ihre Frauen und Mädchen unter Verschluss hielt, dürfte man den seltenen Anblick fremder

⁹⁹Berger, 47.

¹⁰⁰Hatto, 46.

Damen hoch geschätzt und entsprechend genossen haben. Wahrscheinlich hat man die Reize und Kostüme der Damen sehr offen und gründlich erörtert!"¹⁰¹ The degree to which the pleasure of "frouwen schouwen" was regarded as a fixed part of a successful courtly feast may be seen from the fifth *âventiure* of the *Nibelungenlied*, where the heroes of the victorious battle against the Saxons demand and are granted some visual pleasure in return of their efforts for king and country:

Dô sprach zuo dem kûnege der degen Ortwîn:

"welt ir mit vollen êren zer hôhgezîte sîn,
sô sult ir lâzen scouwen diu wûnneclîchen kint,
die mit sô grôzen êren hie zen Burgonden sint.

Waz wære mannes wûnne, des vreute sich sîn lîp,
ez entæten scœne mægede und hêrlichiu wîp?"

Nibelungenlied, stanzas 273-274

[Then Ortwin addressed the King. 'If you wish to win full credit at your festivity, you must bring out our lovely maidens for the guests to see--the pride of Burgundy! Where else could a man find delight, if not in pretty girls and fine-looking women?']¹⁰²

¹⁰¹Lambertus Okken, *Kommentar zum Tristan-Roman Gottfrieds von Strassburg*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1984), 80: "In a world of male dominance in which women and girls were kept under lock and key, the rare sight of unfamiliar ladies must have been highly appreciated and enjoyed. Probably the ladies' charms and attires were discussed very openly and thoroughly."

¹⁰²*The Nibelungenlied*, trans. Hatto, 47.

In this scene, the relationship between gift (i.e. the knights' efforts in the war for their king) and counter-gift (visual pleasure through the rare sight of the courtly ladies) is more direct than in the earlier quoted example of King Marke's feast in *Tristan*. Gunther agrees to Ortwin's suggestion, and it is primarily for the sake of the heroes and not so much for the pleasure of the ladies themselves that the latter are permitted to leave their designated area and participate in the feast.

The desired effect on the guests finds its expression in Ortwin's assertion that the sight of pretty girls and fine-looking women serves as a primary source of a man's delight. This opinion can be found elsewhere in medieval literature -- for example, in Heinrich von Morungen's poem *Diu vil guote*:

Swer der vrouwen
 hüetet, dem künde ich den ban;
 wan durch schouwen
 sô geschuof si got dem man
 Das si wær ein spiegel, al der werlde ein wunne gar.
 waz sol golt begraben, des nieman wirt gewar?

Heinrich von Morungen, *MF* 136,37-137,1¹⁰³

[*I declare the ban on those who guard women, because God created them for
 the man to look at, that she may be a mirror, and the whole world's delight.
 What use has buried gold that nobody can see?*]

¹⁰³*Des Minnesangs Frühling*, ed. Hugo Moser and Helmut Tervooren, 38th ed., vol. 1: *Texte* (Stuttgart: S. Hirzel, 1988), 263.

Examples such as this confirm women's value as objects of visual exchange and thus their importance for the process of male-male interaction.

The non-committal character of this kind of pleasurable encounter on the part of the watching knight becomes most obvious in the context of "frouwen schouwen" in Ulrich von Liechtenstein's *Frauendienst*. In this narrative, too, "frouwen schouwen" functions as a pleasurable distraction, while Ulrich waits for a reaction from his beloved courtly lady, whose unapproachability is the source of so much sorrow and pain:¹⁰⁴

so wil ich hohes muotes sin
 und wil min truren gar uf geben
 und wil in hohem muote leben.
 Min wesen was von dann unlanc,
 hin wider stuont gar min gedanc,
 fünf wochen reit ich vrowen sehen.
 in der zit was daz geschehen,
 daz min niftel hin und her
 was gevarn nach miner ger
 zu miner vrowen und von dan;
 daz wart mir zehant kunt getan.

Frauendienst, stanza 68-69

[Now I want to be of high spirits and want to abandon my sadness and want to live happily. I was not away for long, to return was all I longed for, and for

¹⁰⁴A.T. Hatto, "Vrouwen Schouwen," 45.

five weeks I went to watch ladies. In this time it happened that my niece travelled back and forth according to my wishes between my lady and me; this I got to know very soon.]

As in Gottfried's *Tristan*, the ladies being watched remain anonymous and collective. This, linked with the fact that they do not seem to interfere in any way with Ulrich's everyday existence or his emotional relationship with his courtly *Minnedame*, makes them strangely lifeless, almost unreal. They are, in fact, no more than what Mulvey calls "silent images," destined to enhance the reputation of the ruler under whose power they live.

That "frouwen schouwen" may, of course, also constitute a preliminary to a more physical act of exchange (for example through marriage) has already been observed in the *Nibelungenlied*, where King Gernot explicitly advises Gunther to arrange a meeting between Siegfried and Kriemhild in order to attach the hero to the Burgundian court. In a case like this, the woman subjected to the male gaze is individualized and fulfils a purpose that is more far-reaching, and more personalized, than solely that of granting momentary visual pleasure to the guests of her male relatives. The Burgundians know about Siegfried's wishes concerning their sister and they use the visual, and verbal, exchange as a first step toward a possible marriage--which, true to the nature of exchange, will demand further transactions between the Burgundians and Siegfried.

In Marquard vom Stein's *Der Ritter vom Turn*, the narrator gives his daughters an *exemplum*, drawn from his own life, about the way in which marriage negotiations are to a great degree dependent on the act of "frouwen schouwen." When he himself was still unmarried, a beautiful young woman was suggested to him as a prospective bride. The logical

next step was for him and his father to visit the young woman's father in order to take a look at his daughter:

... als ich üch deß eyn byspel sagen will / das mir selv wyderfaren ist / mit
eyner scho[e]nen edlen wolgebornen junckfrowen die man mir antru[o]g zu[o]
vermaheln / Zu deren fu[o]rt mich myn vatter die zu[o] besehenn .

Der Ritter vom Turn, 101-102

[... of which I will give you an example, which happened to myself in
connection with a noble, well-bred maiden. I was supposed to marry her and
my father led me to her in order to have a look at her.]

In this case the marriage plans fail, yet not because of the woman's lack of beauty, but because of her "unwomanly" intelligence and rhetorical skills, which not only scare this prospective husband away, but manage to sully her reputation. It is especially the woman's active interest in winning the knight as a husband, and the way in which she attempts to take the matter of her marriage into her own hands, that is most strongly disapproved of. Her violation of the role of the passive object of exchange on the marriage market makes her not only an unsuitable bride, but undermines her reputation as a virtuous female.

In a similar manner, the three daughters of a Danish King receive the visit of a delegation sent by a prospective suitor, the King of England: "Do schickt der kunig von Engelland / etlich Ritter vnnd frowen / die besten synes künigrichs / die gemelten dry do[e]chtern zu[o] besehen" [Then the King of England sent several knights and noblewomen, the best of his kingdom, in order to look at the said three daughters; p. 100]. Here "frouwen schouwen" does not serve to confirm the beauty of one prospective bride, but is used in order

to choose one woman among several.

"Frouwen schouwen" as a preliminary to actual exchange is, of course, as one-dimensional as "frouwen schouwen" in the function of courtly entertainment: the prospective husband executes his right to take a look at his prospective bride and decides on the basis of his impression whether he is willing to take her. The bride gets the opportunity to see her suitors, yet she has no right to reject an unwelcome suitor. In fact, she is often not even asked for her opinion. How unwelcome a woman's active interest in her marriage often was, may be seen from the above quoted *exemplum* about the narrator's own youthful marriage plans. Not only the woman's intelligent and witty talk, but to a certain degree also her interest in meeting the suitor again as soon as possible, is regarded as outrageous. In contrast, Kriemhild's shy, but unvoiced, love for Siegfried is made known only to the *Nibelungenlied's* listener or reader and does not result in any form of active pursuit on her part.

"Frouwen schouwen" in all its variations, however, can be seen to further male bonding, while undermining bonding between women in its promotion of female competition. As Hatto points out, "frouwen schouwen" provides more than just male aesthetic pleasure, for it also places the male observer in the role of a judge of female beauty:

Here was fine opportunity, not for ogling, but for trials of *spilnde ougen*; not for losing one's fancy, but for deciding whether a lady was *guot* in the peculiar sense of the phrase 'si dunket mich guot' [...].¹⁰⁵

There is no doubt that Hatto's "one" here also stands exclusively for the male part of medieval humanity (unless we assume that Hatto suspected medieval ladies of losing their fancy over

¹⁰⁵Hatto, "Vrouwen Schouwen," 49.

beautiful women). The beauty competition, which Hatto in another place calls the medieval female equivalent to competitions of manly prowess,¹⁰⁶ by its very nature pits women against each other. Women compete for the highest achievable goal, namely to win the prize as the most beautiful of all the ladies. Similarly, the *exempla* in *Der Ritter vom Turn* play upon female competition. Even when the suitor does not have the choice between three or more women competing for the privilege of an honourable marriage, any woman who is subjected to the judging gaze of a prospective husband competes against other possible matches.

As these few examples demonstrate, the ritual of "frouwen schouwen" works on the basis of an interplay between the construction of male bonds through the symbolic exchange of women and the simultaneous destruction of potential or existing female alliances through the emphasis on female competition. Furthermore, to play upon Sedgwick's above quoted citation, the "sharing" of visual territory creates solidarity between the observing men, who in many instances discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the displayed ladies. And since, as Hatto assures his reader, the male observer entertains no such earthly desires as "winning a mistress" or "risking his reputation,"¹⁰⁷ the danger of competition between the watching men seems to be minimal. The ladies displayed for the pleasure of their eyes are either too far removed from the knights' own social realm or are already promised to one specific knight. Thus the female objects of the male gaze, however much sexual "power" they may have, ultimately remain mere objects in the eyes of others.

The power differential between the genders reinforced by the male gaze and the visual

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 45.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 49.

exchange of women between men is only highlighted by the depictions of women watching men found in medieval German literature. As the following examples show, the two kinds of gaze do not seem to differ greatly at first appearance; however, the amount of power expressed in the depicted visual encounters varies significantly according to the gender of the watching subject. Unlike male spectators, women are usually more restricted in their movement. They may have a better opportunity to watch secretly from a hidden place like a window, but they are not as free in the choice of their object as their male counterparts. Often their gaze is subjected to the control of a male authority that governs their lives, like that of father, brother or uncle.

The third *âventiure* of the *Nibelungenlied* offers a striking example of this constellation. In these stanzas Siegfried for the first time appears at the court of King Gunther and his brothers, uninvited, and with the purpose of winning the hand of Kriemhild, the sister of the three reigning kings, and of gaining power over Burgundy by means of single combat with Gunther. Although his archaic, aggressive behaviour differs significantly from Gunther's diplomatic, courtly attitude, Siegfried's love for Kriemhild conforms to the highest courtly standards, namely the rules of *amour-de-long*. It is this kind of love that keeps Siegfried at Gunther's court for a whole year, hoping that one day he might catch a glimpse of Kriemhild:

Er gedâht ouch manege zîte: "swie sol daz geschehen,
 daz ich die maget edele mit ougen müge sehen?
 die ich von herzen minne und lange hân getân,
 diu ist mir noch vil vremde: des muoz ich trûric gestân."

Nibelungenlied, stanza 136

[As to Siegfried, he often thought: "How shall it ever come about that I may set eyes on this noble young lady? It saddens me that she whom I love with all my heart and have long so loved, remains an utter stranger to me.]¹⁰⁸

Kriemhild, on the other hand, finds herself in a quite different situation. Confined to a limited space within the house, the only mediators between herself and the world outside, between her domestic female occupations and the joyous games of the young knights in the courtyard, are her eyes:

Swenne ûf dem hove wolden spilen dâ diu kint,
 riter unde knehte, daz sach vil dicke sint
 Kriemhilt durch diu venster, diu küneginne hêr.
 daheiner kurzewîle bedorftes in den zîten mêr.

Nibelungenlied, stanza 133

[When the young knights and squires had a mind for some sport in the courtyard, the noble princess Kreimhild would often look on from the window, and as long as it lasted she needed no other entertainment.]¹⁰⁹

The way in which Kriemhild secretly watches the young men outside reveals voyeuristic overtones, but has nevertheless a more binding character than the male institution of "frouwen schouwen." At the time of this scene the reader knows already that Kriemhild is in love with Siegfried, and that it is solely he who is the focus of her gaze. Thus Kriemhild is not only bound physically by the limits of the space assigned to her, but also emotionally by

¹⁰⁸*The Nibelungenlied*, trans. Hatto, 32.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 31.

her love for Siegfried.

This combination of physical and emotional restriction on the part of the watching woman is repeated in the case of Blanscheflur, the daughter of King Marke, who acts as a female spectator at the above mentioned annual May-festival in Gottfried von Straßburg's *Tristan*. Like Kriemhild, Blanscheflur is permitted to watch the knights performing their deeds of prowess; but like Kriemhild, too, Blanscheflur and her ladies, albeit outside the house, are restricted to a defined area, and have to wait until "the bohort [has] moved to where the noble Blanchflor -- a miracle on earth -- and the other lovely women [sit] watching the display."¹¹⁰ They are not permitted the freedom to approach the object of their gaze like knights.

The strange powerlessness inherent in the female gaze becomes more obvious in the light of another scene depicting women watching men, namely in the stanza describing the arrival of Siegfried and Gunther at *Ísenstein* in the *Nibelungenlied*. This scene shows how relationships of power between the genders can be expressed through acts of looking. When in the seventh *âventiure* Siegfried and Gunther arrive at *Ísenstein* in order to win Gunther the hand of Brünhild, they find many beautiful women standing in the windows to watch their arrival, which immediately initiates the familiar ritual of "frouwen schouwen." Yet instead of subjecting themselves to the admiring glances of the approaching knights, the women have to follow Brünhild's command to leave their place at the windows:

Dô hiez diu küneginne ûz den venstern gân
ir hêrlîche magede. sin' solden dâ niht stân

¹¹⁰von Strassburg, *Tristan*, trans. Hatto, 50.

den vremen an ze sehene.

Nibelungenlied, stanza 394

*[Then the Queen told her superb young ladies to move away from the windows -- they were not to stand there as a spectacle for strangers.]*¹¹¹

The ritual of male "frouwen schouwen" is interrupted by Queen Brünhild, because she does not want to see the value of her maids diminished by surrender to the male gaze. And even though in the following stanza the reader is told that the ladies "put on their finery to receive these unknown visitors,"¹¹² they nevertheless convert their status of observed object into that of sole watcher by retreating to the small windows:

an diu engen venster kômen si gegân,
dâ si die helde sâhen; daz wart durch schouwen getân.

Nibelungenlied, stanza 395

*[They [...] went up to the loopholes and through them took note of the warriors.]*¹¹³

Here again we find the German verb "schouwen" in a context where it implies "looking for the sake of looking." The maids, even though they do not seem to be indifferent to the judgment of the heroes, retreat to a less vulnerable position, whereas the male guests suddenly seem to be the only objects on display. This impression is strengthened not only by the knights' position as objects of a collective and anonymous female gaze, but also by their

¹¹¹*The Nibelungenlied*, trans. Hatto, 60.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, 60.

¹¹³*Ibid.*

comparatively passive role. This time, Siegfried and Gunther have no opportunity to demonstrate their dexterity underneath the windows of a love-sick courtly lady; they are only guests, who have little power in the face of Queen Brünhild of *Ísenstein*.

The example of Brünhild suggests not only that the traditional role of women as looked-at object had its basis in male-female power relations rather than in a natural female disposition, but also that a reversal of these power relations was judged negatively by the narrator(s) of the texts. While Kriemhild fits well enough into the picture of the woman who tries to obtain information about the male world outside her chamber in a voyeuristic way, Brünhild because of her position of power is able to engage in direct encounters with the male world. Her decision to retreat to the small windows has its reason in her rejection of the male gaze rather than in her inability to initiate direct eye-to-eye contact. Brünhild may decide for herself if, when and how she and her maids wish to meet the eyes of her visitors, and she uses her power to interrupt the ritual of male "frouwen schouwen." It is interesting that the rejection of the male gaze constitutes a characteristic of an independent and self-confident woman, and that it needs the strength of a Brünhild to attain the position of being able to avoid the uneasiness of being subjected to the male gaze.

Yet still the described inversion of power relations has its limits. Not even in the case of a strikingly "male" Brünhild do we find a medieval notion expressing the idea of "knight watching" in a form as institutionalized as "frouwen schouwen." In addition to that, female watchers, in contrast to their male counterparts, are not permitted to keep their visual impressions secret. While the reader is usually left without any description of the ladies who are subjected to the act of "frouwen schouwen," there are no doubts as to the specific objects

of the female gaze. In the case of Kriemhild, as well as of Brünhild and her maids, the reader receives a detailed description of the knights who are being watched. The ladies may be permitted to watch secretly, but they are not entitled to keep their impressions secret and thus to escape control over their lives.

The connection between women's immobility and the female gaze becomes clear also from the example of Beringer's wife in the already discussed *maere* of the same title. As the reader will remember, in this story Beringer's wife one day follows her husband secretly in order to find out more about his knightly prowess on the battlefield. Not only is the wife forced to crossdress in order to be able to leave the house, but she also watches her husband secretly, hidden behind a bush:

Do gedacht herr beringers wyb:

"fur war, dz fieget mir hart wol

dz ich den turner sehen sol,

wie min man vbt sich."

[...]

Die frauw lügen do began,

wo her beringer der kune man,

wen er bezwung oder wo er stritt,

wann er daheim so vil seit.

Beringer, v. 108-111 and 132-135.

[Then Beringer's wife thought: "Truly this comes in handy that I will be able to see the tournament and how my husband performs." [...]] Then the woman

*started to watch secretly whom lord Beringer the bold man defeated
and where he fought, because he told so much at home about his boldness.]*

Even though in this scene the secrecy of the woman's watching can be explained by the fact that she wants to observe her husband without his knowing, it still serves as a reminder of woman's tendency to keep her gaze hidden. It is the traditional immobility of the watching lady and the male control over her gaze on which Beringer wrongly relies. While he assumes that as a woman his wife will not be able to follow him and uncover his secret, he does not reckon with her insights into the artificiality of medieval gender roles. As I have already shown, Beringer's wife soon discovers that sometimes only a few "props" are needed in order to provide a woman with all the "male" freedom she needs --a fact Beringer is unaware of. Unlike Blanscheflur and Kriemhild discussed above, Beringer's wife decides to watch not only the tournaments that are meant for her eyes, but also the one that is not meant for her and that is therefore purposefully removed from the restricted gaze of the traditional medieval woman. And Beringer's wife is rewarded by the sight of a part of male reality that differs drastically from the one carefully chosen for her. In the disguise of a man, she is finally able to compare her husband's words with what she sees with her own eyes, and she is enraged, though not completely surprised, by the discrepancies between the two realities offered to her. *Beringer* shows how much the male construction of reality relies on the control of the female gaze and on women's inability to verify the "reality" that is offered to them by the men that control their lives.

One other important reason for the the pervasiveness of the image of a woman watching men from a confined space, such as a window, becomes obvious if one takes a look

at pictorial representations of this topic. A glance through the *Heldenbuch*,¹¹⁴ the oldest illustrated print of several epics from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, for example, provides a good impression of the way early artists interpreted scenes describing watching women. The *Heldenbuch* was printed about 1483 by Johann Prüss in Straßburg and contains among others the epics *Wolfdietrich* and *Ortnit*. Among the numerous woodprints of the *Heldenbuch*, we find three *identical* ones in different parts of the *Heldenbuch*, depicting the outlines of a castle, two towers with windows from which several ladies are watching two knights jousting.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, there is a set of two other *identical* woodprints showing a variation on this theme, namely two towers and the wall of a castle. Again there are two knights jousting outside the castle, while one lady is watching from behind the wall.¹¹⁶ There are also two woodprints depicting one lady in communication with a knight outside the castle to which she confined.¹¹⁷ The fact that these woodprints come from different parts of the *Heldenbuch* and illustrate different parts of the text demonstrates that the image of the confined woman watching was a staple in medieval literature. Even though, of course, financial reasons may have played a part in the editor's decision to use the same woodprint for several similar scenes in the text, these images nevertheless produce and re-enforce the

¹¹⁴*Heldenbuch: Nach dem ältesten Druck in Abbildung*, ed. Joachim Heinzle, vol 1.: *Abbildungsband* (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1981) and *Heldenbuch: Nach dem ältesten Druck in Abbildung*, ed. Joachim Heinzle, vol. 2: *Kommentarband* (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1987). All quotations are taken from these two editions.

¹¹⁵*Heldenbuch*, *Abbildungsband*, fols. 71r., 109v., and 156r.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, fols. 88v. and 247v.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*, fols. 161v. and 162r.

recurrent stereotype of the secretly watching woman. The practice of using the same woodprint to illustrate similar scenes certainly accounts for the fact that sometimes not all of the parts of the woodprint are an accurate representation of the narrative. Even if the text, for example, offers only the description of a fight between two or more knights, we find the ladies watching from their tower in the woodprint, as for example in the tournament held by Hugdietrich in honour of the coming of age of his sons.¹¹⁸ In one instance the woodprint even contradicts the text by depicting the lady watching from the tower when in the text she is in a totally different location, namely on the field of battle itself. The scene in question is to be found at the beginning of the *Heldenbuch* where Wolfdietrich duells against Ortnit outside the walls of *Garten*.¹¹⁹ The text states that Ortnit's wife Sigeminne leaves the fortress secretly in order to watch the fight more closely: "da kam zu[o] in geschlichen / die edel keiserein / sie lu[o]gte taugeliche / wie es da wo[e]lt ergan" [the noble queen came sneaking, she watched secretly what would happen there; fol. 88r.]. The woodprint, however, shows her observing the scene from behind the walls. Not only does the fact that Sigeminne has to do her watching in secrecy point to the illicitness of her act, but the woodprint quite successfully overrides the impression the text makes by putting the queen back in her "traditional place." It is of little importance here why Prüss chose this particular woodprint and whether he consciously wanted to make a comment on a woman's traditional place. The result remains the same: throughout the *Heldenbuch* the reader is confronted with images of confined women watching men performing deeds of knightly prowess outside the very towers or castle

¹¹⁸Ibid., fols. 66r-67v.

¹¹⁹*Heldenbuch*, fols. 88v-90v.

walls that restrict their own freedom. The fact that this image comes to mind almost automatically even today may owe something to medieval "stereotyping" of the kind we find in Prüss's *Heldenbuch*.

The immobility of the watching ladies and their confinement to particular spaces, as well as their dependence on male authorities, diminish the potential power of the female gaze as compared to its male counterpart. The fact that the female watcher often appears like a prisoner whose helpless gaze is directed at a world beyond her reach, takes much of the inherent threat out of her gaze. While the male act of "frouwen schouwen" eventually serves to create male bonds through the exchange of visual pleasure, there is no female bond created by the act of women watching men, even if the watching is done by a group of women. Women may discuss their impressions of specific men with each other, yet since they do not have the power to act upon their visual impressions, their gaze remains impotent. No such thing as an exchange of men between women exists, since women have no power to give and are only to be given. As becomes clear from the examples of Brünhild and Beringer's wife, it is only in violation of the traditional female role that a woman is able to assume the power inherent in the traditional male gaze. For this reason it is no coincidence that Brünhild's forced retreat to the traditional female role of a king's wife is accompanied by her subjection to the act of "frouwen schouwen" upon her arrival in Burgundy. Brünhild is not only forced to relinquish the "male gaze" that she had briefly appropriated at *Ísenstein*, but she has to accept the traditional female role as the passive object of the ritual of "frouwen schouwen." Similarly, Beringer's wife not only relinquishes the "male gaze" together with her male clothing, but from the moment she leaves the male persona behind, she loses the ability to

make any direct use of the information she has gained with her own eyes. It is only through the creation of the persona of another male, the knight Wienant, that she is eventually able to reap the benefits of her uncontrolled watching.

The above examples demonstrate that, while a woman's appropriation of the male gaze may serve her own female interests, the traditional female gaze as constructed by the male narrators of these texts finds its only function in its ability to enhance the qualities of the male object by ascribing the positive judgment of his chivalric qualities to a party other than himself, thus creating the impression of impartiality. In the texts discussed here, only the men can make active use of *looking* --of the visual pleasure provided by beautiful women and the visual exchange of these women in order to establish and consolidate bonds with other men.

4. Conclusions

Despite individual differences and differences in genre, the texts examined in this chapter provide a surprisingly uniform picture of the phenomenon of male homosocial bonding. The key elements discussed are to a greater or lesser degree discernible in all of the texts: the exchange and use of women in order to maintain male bonds; the utilization and/or destruction of female bonding; and the often careful differentiation between the spheres of the homosocial and the homosexual on the conscious textual level. As becomes obvious, the process of exchanging women between men can be based on different degrees of force,

ranging from the deliberate exchange of a woman as a gift between two men (as in the stories of "Amicus und Amelius" and "Athis und Prophlias" in *Der Grosse Seelentrost*), to the prompted exchange of a woman (as in Hartmann *Iwein*), to forced exchange (as exemplified by the *raptus* of Hilde and Kudrun in *Kudrun*). In all cases, however, women play only a passive role as object of exchange and, hence, more or less unintentionally, as initiator of male bonds. As the episodes between Laudine and Lunete and the two daughters of the knight *von dem Swarzen dorne* show, exclusively female bonds are not only discouraged, but their disruption may play an important part in the creation of male bonds. Lunete in *Iwein* and Uote in the *Nibelungenlied* show how women turn against the interests of a member of their own gender by actively participating in the exchange of another woman, thereby strengthening the power of patriarchy. In a similar way, the struggle between the two daughters of the knight *von dem Swarzen dorne* emphasizes the inherent fragility of female bonds and how this weakness may prove an advantage to male-male relationships.

There is a wide-spread notion that medieval relationships of love between men are by nature non-erotic, as discussed by Jeffrey Richards, who in his *Sex, Dissidence and Damnation* discusses the different types of love prevalent in the Middle Ages:

There was the love of God, which in some cases became passionate and almost erotic; love between men of an emotional but non-sexual kind and based on mutual affection and respect; courtly love in which an unmarried man did gallant deeds in the name of a married woman and the keynote of which was yearning and suffering. None of these versions involved sexual

fulfilment.¹²⁰

The last notion does not hold true for all of the medieval German texts discussed here. As was shown, the bond between Amicus and Amelius in *Der Große Seelentrost*, and to some extent also that between Siegfried and Gunther in the *Nibelungenlied*, sometimes seem to transgress the boundaries between modern notions of homosocial and homosexual relationships. Moreover, it might be argued that at least the friendship between Amicus and Amelius involves sexual fulfilment, symbolized by their sharing of their final resting place. In relationships like these, the woman, while serving as the basis of the bond, is finally replaced by a man, who takes her own role in the relationship to her husband.

The medieval notion of "triuwe" proves to be one of the key concepts underlying medieval homosocial bonds between men. In many of the male-male relationships depicted, the realm of feelings between the friends is subsumed under this category. As is pointed out repeatedly, "triuwe" is the reason for the "selfless" acts of Amicus and Amelius and of Athis and Prophilias, toward each other. It is only the others, women and children, who suffer as a result of this exceptional male "triuwe." Yet, as the analysis of *Iwein* shows, the overwhelmingly positive force of male "triuwe" (regarded from the male point of view) can also be turned into a negative force. In such a case, men are made to suffer as do the "usual" victims of these male friendships, namely women and children. Since the laws of medieval male bonding force its participants to adhere to certain codes of behaviour (expressed for example by the concepts of "triuwe" and "êre") men are to a high degree "bound," and hence potential "victims" of the same laws of male homosocial bonding that provide them with so

¹²⁰Richards, 26.

much power. King Artus's suffering from the actions of the foreign knight might be compared to the suffering of the female object of this male-male contest, namely his wife Ginover. In this episode the pleasures of male homosocial bonding are neutralized by its pressures. These same pressures become obvious in a slightly different way also in Marquard von Stein's instructional book *Der Ritter vom Turn*. Here the daughters give testimony to the success or failure of their father's role as their instructor, which in turn determines the quality of the bond between the father and his potential son-in-law. *Der Ritter vom Turn* demonstrates how a man can fail in the eyes of the male community through his daughters.

The section on "frouwen schouwen" illustrates that the concept of the exchange of women in its more abstract form is still alive today. Even though the subjection of a woman to the gaze of other, usually strictly selected men, is a more subtle form of exchange than a marriage deal between two families, it places the woman in the same position to the man. The strategy of exchanging women on a non-physical, symbolic level creates a connection between past and present, between the European Middle Ages and modern European societies, while at the same time pointing to the importance of the concept of male homosocial bonding as one of the main pillars of patriarchy in past and present.

In the process of male homosocial bonding not only the power relationships between the genders are constantly re-negotiated, but also the concepts of masculinity and femininity themselves. Women as tokens of exchange between men inhabit an inferior position in the relationship between the genders that seems, at first glance, relatively fixed. Nevertheless, the woman's very function as token of exchange between men also provides her with a certain power, which she can use in her own favour. The daughters of *Der Ritter vom Turn*, for

example, have to be carefully instructed in order to fulfil the expectations of patriarchal society. Failure to provide the marriage market with marriageable daughters works to the disadvantage of the fathers. And even the fact that the daughter herself pays dearly for her failure as a bride and wife, does not draw attention away from the knowledge that the father, too, pays the price for his unruly daughter. The fact that the daughter's shame will ultimately be the father's gives the daughter a certain disruptive power. In a similar way, Brünhild's wedding-night in the *Nibelungenlied* shows how a woman's unwillingness to participate in her own exchange can force the man into a vulnerable position. Siegfried has to go to great lengths to "break" Brünhild for Gunther and thus keep intact their male-male relationship, which is based on the exchange of Brünhild. Even though in all the exchanges the woman turns out to be the weaker part, the texts show that she, as a token of exchange, can in some cases exert a certain influence on the men who are participating in this process.

Yet not only the power relationships between the genders may be temporarily upset during such a process of exchange, but also the very concepts of masculinity and femininity. Especially in cases where the homosocial bond between two men crosses the borders to the homosexual, the notion of masculinity may be questioned. The story of "Amicus und Amelius" in *Der Große Seelentrost* serves as a prime example for this. Amelius's act of replacing his wife with Amicus might be interpreted as effeminizing Amicus, who may not become more womanly in appearance, but assumes a feminine position in his relationship with Amelius. Similarly, Gunther in the *Nibelungenlied* seems to inhabit the weaker, feminine position in relationship to Siegfried, who seems destined to fulfil the more daring, "manly" tasks in Gunther's stead. Consequently, this part shows that male homosocial

bonding is not only strongly linked to the relationship between the genders in general, but influences the power-relationship between men and women in many individual cases.

PART THREE: MEN ENCOUNTERING "OTHER" WOMEN

1. Otherness in Medieval Literature

Despite the normative picture that medieval German literature conveys of the medieval woman, it offers a surprisingly diverse selection of often marginalized, untypical, "other" women. Most notable among them are supernatural women, Wild Women, heathen women and old women, i.e. women who in one way or another differ from the male-defined ideal of medieval femininity. In light of Simone de Beauvoir's definition of woman as Other, my term "other" woman needs some words of explanation. As is well-known, de Beauvoir derives her notion of woman's Otherness from woman's posited relationship to the masculine Self:

she [i.e. woman] is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute--she is the Other.¹

De Beauvoir's definition of woman is as powerful as it is encompassing. Linguists, such as Julia P. Stanley and Susan W. Robbins have shown how deeply this division of male Self and female Other is entrenched in many languages, as may be seen from the usage of the English pronoun "he":

It is also worthy to note that, throughout the history of English, the pronoun *he*

¹Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, ed. and trans. H. M. Parshley (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1968; originally published 1949.), xvi.

has served a dual function. It not only replaces noun phrases with male referents, but it also serves as a 'generic' pronoun, designating humanity in general. We believe that there is some justification for the view that the use of the male* as 'generic,' and the apparently persistent need for a pronoun which uniquely specifies the female gender, must spring from the same conception of the identities and roles assigned to female and males in male-dominated culture. On the one hand, the use of the female pronoun sets off all females as 'other,' in the sense of de Beauvoir; on the other hand, the use of the male pronoun designates not also male but also humanity...²

The authors' conclusion reaffirms de Beauvoir's notion of woman's inferior role in relation to man:

Since the female pronoun *always* designates females, while the male pronoun designates all humans as well as all males, patriarchal language, as manifested in the pronominal system of English, extended the scope of maleness to *include* humanity, while restricting femaleness to 'the Other,' who is by implication non-human.³

Similar observations can also be made with respect to the German pronominal system.

The male Self as point of reference is used also in the psychological assessment of

²Julia P. Stanley and Susan W. Robbins, "Going Through the Changes: The Pronoun She in Middle English," *Papers in Linguistics* 11 (1978): 81.

³Ibid, 83.

girls and women, as Carol Gilligan has pointed out.⁴ The fact that the female Other is sometimes compared to the child in terms of psychological development derives from the fact that female difference in psychological development is equated with failure of development:

In order to go beyond the question, "How much like men do women think, how capable are they of engaging in the abstract and hypothetical construction of reality?" it is necessary to identify and define criteria that encompass the categories of women's thought.⁵

As long as man's way of thinking remains the standard, different ways of assessing reality will continue to be regarded as less developed, inferior. A similar problem is currently being discussed in connection with the scientific assessment of intelligence. It is no secret that the categories upon which the official definition of "intelligence" is based are selective and do not take into consideration issues such as class, race or gender. As David Aers points out, this particular definition of "intelligence" is exclusionary in its nature and serves a specific political purpose:

Under careful scrutiny, it became clear that what was being identified was not some quintessential 'intelligence' but a particular set of linguistic and perceptual features which were characteristic of white middle-class culture and interests. The test of 'intelligence,' legitimising (in conservative people's eyes) the separation of the population into higher schools (about 20 per cent)

⁴Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard UP, 1982), 69.

⁵*Ibid.*, 70.

and lower (the rest) was simply part of the maintenance of the existing class structure under the guise of 'objective' and meritocratic selection.⁶

As this last example shows, the differentiation between a normative Self and its deviant Other is important not only on the psychological and philosophical levels, but in a more concrete form also in the political sphere. Political scientists, such as Catherine A. MacKinnon, see the distinction between the male Self and the female Other, or, as MacKinnon calls it, between "sameness" and "difference," as the basis for the unequal legal treatment of men and women in modern society. Since the two sexes are by their very definition "unlike," women cannot expect the same treatment before the law that men receive:

According to the approach to sex equality that has dominated politics, law, and social perception, equality is an equivalence, not a distinction, and sex is a distinction. The legal mandate of equal treatment --which is both a systemic norm and a specific legal doctrine-- becomes a matter of treating likes alike and unlikes unlike; and the sexes are defined as such by their mutual unlikeness.⁷

MacKinnon argues that "gender neutrality [under the law] is simply the male standard,"⁸ and women are treated equally only to the degree of their proximity to male standards: "to the

⁶Aers, 4.

⁷Catherine A. MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard UP, 1987), 32.

⁸Ibid., 34.

extent that women are no different from men, we deserve what they have."⁹ MacKinnon's observations mirror the linguistic rules I have quoted earlier: in a similar way in which the pronoun "she" in the English language registers everything distinctively different from the male standard, special treatment for women under the law applies in specific "female" cases, such as pregnancy. And, in language as well as in law, the male standard is the universal referent --otherwise it would not always be ignored that, as MacKinnon points out, "men's differences from women are equal to women's differences from men."¹⁰

The concept of Otherness is, of course, useful not only for male-female relations, but for all types of relationships between the Self and a "foreign" agency. Anthropologists, beginning with Lévi-Strauss, have used the same concept to describe interactions between members of different races, cultures, nations, etc., between a cultural, national, racial "us" and the "non-us."¹¹ Yet, as anthropologist A.S. Khare claims, the "gendered Other [...] is an appropriate subject for another paper."¹² In a similar way in which Khare's pronoun "him" is meant to "designate all anthropologists"¹³ regardless of their sex, the cultural, national or racial "us" does not necessarily differentiate between male and female. A woman may thus belong to a cultural "us" while still remaining the Other in terms of gender.

⁹Ibid., 33.

¹⁰Ibid., 37.

¹¹For an overview over the current anthropological discussion of Otherness, see R. S. Khare, "The Other's Double --The Anthropologist's Bracketed Self: Notes on Cultural Representation and Privileged Discourse," *New Literary History* 23 (1992):1-23.

¹²Ibid., 17, n.3.

¹³Ibid.

As one can see from the above observations, de Beauvoir's notion of the gendered Other, whether acknowledged or not, underlies a host of different concepts of Otherness. Yet, despite the decisive nature of de Beauvoir's concept of female Otherness, in light of the variety of women encountered in medieval literature, I cannot restrict this discussion solely to her concept of *the* woman as Other. I want to ask here with Sara Lennox "*which* women, *when?*"¹⁴ It is this question of *which* women feminists are speaking about that has led to the introduction of concepts of race, class and sexual orientation into the feminist debate, and hence to specific feminist disciplines such as black feminist criticism or lesbian feminist criticism. By using the ideal of medieval femininity as a second point of reference, I shall try to integrate the historical and cultural component addressed in Lennox's question "*which* women, *when?*" The term "other" woman as I plan to use it is thus defined not only with reference to man but also with reference to the normative ideal of medieval femininity. The "other" woman that I plan to investigate in my texts is defined not only as a woman, but as a "deviant" woman who in particular defies medieval Christian norms of femininity.

By offering its audience a variety of women, medieval literature, in spite of its unifying tendencies, ultimately defies the notion of a unified female subject and acknowledges the diversity of possible definitions of femininity. Moreover, some of these counter-positions seem to be explicitly created as a contrast to the ideal of medieval

¹⁴Lennox, 160. On this topic, see especially Helena Michie, "Not One of the Family: The Repression of the Other Woman in Feminist Theory," in *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1993), 59-60: "In popular romance the Other woman is the mistress, the rival, the sexual threat. She is, however, Other in other senses: she is the third-world woman, the lesbian, the antifeminist, the one who is excluded from or resists the embrace of Oedipal sisterhood."

femininity, partly in order to define or reinforce the same ideal. It might, of course, be argued that medieval "other" women only constitute often extreme, visible symbols of "every-woman's" inherent Otherness in de Beauvoir's sense of the term, which is then projected onto the fringes of medieval society by masculine fear or desire. As, for example, Lynda E. Boose supposes, this kind of projection plays a part in the construction of the black woman in early modern English racial discourse, and she claims that "it is in the person of the black woman that the culture's pre-existing fears both about the female sex and about gender dominance are realized."¹⁵ This view, with which I agree, is supported by the fact that some of the depicted categories of "other" women have no basis in real life, but have to be seen as literary inventions--among them the "Wild Woman" and the supernatural woman. Others, such as the heathen woman and the old woman, were found in historical medieval societies, yet their image in medieval literature could be as far removed from historical reality as that of the Wild Woman and the supernatural woman. What Louise Mirrer states for the Muslim woman in the texts of reconquest Castile, is probably true also for the heathen women in the Middle High German texts I examine:

Imagined, on the one hand, as possessing a range and depth of power never evidenced in legal, historical, or doctrinal works of the period and, on the other hand, as seductive, consenting, and submissive to Christians, these women are inventions --pseudoidealizations, or ideal constructions,

¹⁵Lynda E. Boose: "'The Getting of a Lawful Race:' Racial Discourse in Early Modern England and the Unrepresentable Black Woman," in *Women, "Race," and Writing in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 46.

antithetical to actual experience. Lascivious, aristocratic female Muslim women, depicted in the literature of a culture where respectable Muslim women were kept veiled from head to ankles and guarded, protected, and distanced from Christian men's view, are clearly fabrications.¹⁶

In a similar way, Heather Arden's observation concerning the widow in medieval French literature can be extended to the old women I examine in this thesis, namely that they are "archetypal embodiments of deeply rooted male attitudes toward women and female sexuality"¹⁷ rather than accurate depictions of historical widows. Even though the two old women I discuss in this chapter are never explicitly identified as widows, they are nevertheless described as single old women who at the time of the story have no husband (or any other family, for that matter) and are forced to make their own living on the fringes of medieval society. My analysis will corroborate Arden's conclusion, "that they [i.e. widows] share certain responses to sexuality; and that their male antagonists, and authors, show toward them a deeply felt hostility, sometimes mixed with admiration."¹⁸

Common to all four categories of "other" women I analyze is that they are often explicitly designed as opposites to the ideal of the medieval courtly lady. This opposition becomes most clear in cases where the text describes the transformation of a character from "other" woman to courtly lady, as happens for example to the Wild Woman "rûhe" Else in

¹⁶Louise Mirrer, *Women, Jews, and Muslims in the Texts of Reconquest Castile* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 1996), 3.

¹⁷Arden, 306.

¹⁸Ibid., 305.

Wolfdietrich B. Although the psychological component of a possible transference of feared or desired female character traits onto specifically designed woman-figures by the medieval male mind should always be kept in mind, I nevertheless plan to view "other" women in medieval German literature as the independent literary personalities as which they are presented by the text.

Medieval depictions of "other" women usually illustrate "otherness" through physical and psycho-cultural characteristics that deviate from the accepted norms of femininity in medieval society. Most of these characteristics can be subsumed under the category "degree of 'civilization' or societal refinement." Among them we find most often "temperament," "physical appearance," "habitat" and "relationship to the Christian religion." I want to emphasize that my term "physical characteristics" should not be confused with the modern ethnological concept of "race." Although certain physical characteristics, most notably skin colour, may coincide with modern racial characteristics, they nevertheless fulfil a different function in medieval literature. As my examination will show, it is often the relationship to Christianity rather than geographical or racial difference that determines "otherness." As Bernard McGrane formulates it, "within the Christian conception of Otherness anthropology did not exist; there was, rather, demonology. It was in relation to the fall and to the influence of Sin and satan that the Other took on his [sic] historically specific meaning."¹⁹ While supernatural women, Wild Women and heathen women take a clear position outside the realm of Christianity, old women often live within the Christian community, yet reveal their

¹⁹Bernard McGrane, *Beyond Anthropology: Society and the Other* (New York: Columbia UP, 1989), ix.

non-Christian side by their association with the devil.

In addition to violations of conventional feminine appearance and beauty, transgressions of gender boundaries play an important part in the descriptions of "other" women. These transgressions and violations are especially important, since medieval "other" women are often depicted in interaction with traditional medieval men. It is in their relationship with men that "other" women appear as distinctively female and as sexual beings. In contrast to encounters between medieval "deviant" men (such as Wild Men, male heathens or male sorcerers) and courtly ladies, which often only highlight the traditional power-relationship between the genders by presenting it in an extreme, and sometimes savage, form, the encounters between "other" women and courtly Christian knights usually disrupt accepted societal gender relations. In these encounters, the woman is shown not only in a role other than that prescribed for a medieval woman, but the woman's deviant position questions or challenges the position of the male, who may have to struggle to retain or regain his traditional superior position in the gender relationship. Although Wild Men, male heathens, sorcerers and similar "deviant" males play an important part in medieval literature (and have, in the case of the Wild Man, often received much critical attention), I want to concentrate primarily on "other" women and their relationship to conventional, socially accepted, "normal" medieval men. The encounters in most of the texts I examine can therefore be described as encounters between the male Christian Self and the female non-Christian "other."

A second feature common to most medieval "other" women is their association with or position outside the realms inhabited by civilization or society: they usually live in foreign

countries, wild forests or other alien elements, such as the sea. Their designated areas not only symbolize the woman's difference in spacial terms but usually serve as the place of the initial meeting with the knight, thus providing her with an (at least temporary) position of power, adding to the "lure" and danger already inherent in her "otherness." The unity between the "other" woman and "her" often threatening realm constitutes one of her major sources of power. For this reason it is scarcely surprising to find that the male trapped in the realm of the "other" usually attempts either to leave this to him "foreign" country or to incite the "other" woman to leave her realm and to let herself be integrated into medieval Christian society. Yet, no matter how the encounters between the male Christian Self and the female non-Christian "other" end, they always fulfil their major purposes: to provide an opportunity for the male compiler, narrator, listener or reader of the text to live out hidden fantasies and fears concerning the female, and at the same time to see the conventional roles assigned to men and women in medieval society redefined and reinforced. Yet one could also add a power-political aspect to these considerations. In the case of politically powerful "other" women, I would suggest that Mirrer's viewpoint concerning the heathen women in Castilian literature might be equally valid for Middle High German literature:

Female images in the medieval literary corpus worked to disqualify women from legitimately holding power in Castile. They demonstrated that women were unfit for leadership, showing either that they were too weak or that they abused authority when they possessed it. Indeed, the texts appealed for women's exclusion from access to the discourses of power, for the good of

everyone appeared to depend on it.²⁰

If one accepts this viewpoint for some of my texts, the encounters between the female non-Christian "other" and the male Christian Self highlight the advantages for the male of the traditional relationship between the genders not only on the personal, but also on the political level.

1.1. Supernatural Women

a) *Der Ritter von Staufenberg*

The *maere Der Ritter von Staufenberg*²¹ describes the relationship between a courtly knight, Peterman von Temringer, born "von Sto[u]ffenberg" (v. 52), a brave and respected warrior, and a nameless fairy. In contrast to many "other" women, this fairy, apart from being described as exceptionally beautiful, does not seem to be different from "normal" women in physical appearance. Her "otherness" is expressed most notably through the topography with which she is connected, the medieval forest. While on their way to holy mass in Nussbach, Peterman and his page encounter the fairy for the first time:

²⁰Mirrer, *Women, Jews, and Muslims*, 3.

²¹*Der Ritter von Staufenberg*, ed. Eckhard Grunewald (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1979). All quotations from *Der Ritter von Staufenberg* are from this edition.

Der knabe ryt den burgweg ab;
 ze hand so siht der selbe knab
 sitzen uff eim steine
 ein frowe alters eine,
 die so rehte scho[e]ne waz.
 iuns seyt die ofenture daz,
 daz got an dise welte ye
 scho[e]ner wiep ließ werden nye
 von fleische noch von beyne
 also die zarte reyne;
 scho[e]ner wip wart nie gesehen.

Ritter von Staufenberg, v. 201-213

[The page rode down the path from the castle; suddenly the same page sees sitting on a stone a lady all alone who was so very beautiful. The story tells us that God in this world never created a more beautiful woman neither from flesh nor from bone than the tender pure one; there was never seen a more beautiful woman.]

The lady is seated all by herself on a stone--a feature which seems to have survived from the tradition of water nymphs, who are usually sitting on a rock in the sea, often combing their beautiful hair and attempting to lure hapless voyagers to their deaths. In this case the stone is not in the sea but in a similar strange and hostile environment, namely the medieval forest:

"so lag der stein by einem hage" [thus the stone lay next to a forest; line 222]. The medieval

wanderer knew that upon entering the forest he was leaving the realm of civilization and putting himself at the mercy of strange, often hostile, powers:

As Higounet points out, the medieval forest served as a frontier, a refuge for pagan cults and hermits "who came looking for the 'desert' (*erenum*)" as well as those defeated in war and those who lived on the fringes of society: fugitive serfs, murderers, soldiers of fortune, brigands.²²

Yet the fairy is found not only in an alien and uninhabited place outside the safe realm of castles, cloisters and villages, but she is there all by herself--a rare position for a medieval lady to find herself in. Even for a medieval man, isolation was a suspicious state, "inspiring, [...] either great admiration or profound suspicion, because feudal society was composed of social clots so compact that they imprisoned individuals together in a narrow existence."²³ Therefore it is hardly surprising that the knight, who falls in love with the fairy at first sight, remarks on her loneliness: "genade, werde reine / wie sind ir hie so eine,/ daz u[e]ch nieman wanet by?" [pray, worthy pure one, how is it possible that you are so alone here, that nobody accompanies you?"; v. 319-321]. In her answer the lady discloses her nature as a fairy, informing the knight that she has accompanied and protected him for many years and in many a place and battle, invisible to him, and that she now has awaited him at this very place. Her

²²Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago and London: U of Chicago Press, 1988), 52-53. Yet, as Corinne Saunders has observed, despite its reputation as a place of danger it should not be overlooked that the medieval forest may also play a more positive part in medieval literature, for example as a place of "adventure, love, and spiritual vision." Corinne J. Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance: Avernus, Broceliande, Arden* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993), ix.

²³Roger Bartra, *Wild Men in the Looking Glass: The Mythic Origins of European Otherness*, trans. Carl T. Berrisford (Ann Arbor: The U of Michigan Press, 1994), 112-13.

ability to appear and disappear whenever and wherever she wishes places her not only outside the realm of medieval femininity, but relegates her to the supernatural. The pact the fairy offers Peterman in the following lines is meant to lure the love-wounded knight out of the society to which he belongs and in which he plays such a distinguished role:

wiltu truten minen lip,
 so mu[o]stu one elich wip
 iemer sin untz an dinen tot
 [...]
 aber nimst ein elich wip,
 so stirbet din vil stolzer lip
 dar nach am dritten tage

Ritter von Staufenberg, v. 381-83; 393-95

[If you wish to caress my body you have to remain without a wife until your death [...]. But if you take a wife your proud body will be dead three days later.]

Not only must the knight remain unmarried if he wishes to love the fairy, but their encounters must be secret, with the stigma of the forbidden attached to them. What the knight receives in return is a willing mistress who appears at his bed every time he is stirred by desire. Peterman complies with her demands, and for a period of time he lives the free and happy life of a young knight, duelling and jousting during the day, enjoying the passionate embraces of his mistress at night.

With her prohibition to marry, the fairy disturbs one of the most important societal

norms concerning the relationship between the genders. Although it is not unusual for a young knight, or a "youth" in Georges Duby's terms, to enjoy his freedom for a certain time, his final goal is to contract a suitable marriage and produce male heirs to carry on his name.²⁴ As Duby explains, the terms *juvenis* and *juventus* "have a precise meaning and [...] were used to indicate membership to a particular social group. [...] 'Youth' can be defined as the period in a man's life between his being dubbed knight and his becoming a father."²⁵ For this reason it is less the sexual freedom Peterman enjoys with the fairy (a kind of freedom that was granted to young knights) that renders the liason dangerous, than her demand that he should remain forever unmarried, an eternal "youth." In contrast to many other young knights, especially younger brothers of a family, who have no inheritance to expect and are dependent on winning the hand of a rich heiress, Peterman already seems to enjoy the position as ruler over land and people. It is his responsibility to his name and land to produce an heir in case he should die prematurely, for example in a duel. In this story, this argument is advanced by the people who would suffer most in such an event, namely his (presumably younger) brothers and his retainers:

su[e] sprachent: "lieber fru[e]nt, du hast
 eren und o[u]ch g[o]tes vil;
 so ist es o[u]ch wol uff dem zil,
 daz du solt ein e wip han,

²⁴On the life of *les jeunes* in medieval aristocratic society, see especially Georges Duby, "Youth in Aristocratic Society," in *The Chivalrous Society*, trans. Cynthia Postan (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California Press, 1977), 112-122.

²⁵Duby, "Youth," 112-13.

die dinen eren wol gezan.
 des byttent wir nun alle dich.
 du bist ein helt so ritterlich,
 soltestu vor zite gan
 und keinen erben nach dir lan,
 daz wer uns allen schand und leit."

Ritter von Staufenberg, v. 654-63

[They said: "Dear friend, you have plenty of honours and also wealth; so it is time now that you should have a wife who suits your honour. This it what we all ask you for: You are such a splendid knight, should you have to die prematurely without leaving behind an heir this would be shame and suffering for us."]

Yet, although Peterman, after some fierce resistance, eventually gives in to the pressures of family and Christian Church, and agrees to a political marriage, his "supernatural" mistress is not as easily "discarded" as the mistresses of other unmarried knights. As the story relates, the fairy does not relinquish her power over the knight but strengthens it even more. At the first sign of his disobedience, she removes Peterman from society. In accordance with her prophecies, Peterman dies on the third day after his marriage before the eyes of his horrified wedding-guests, leaving a young widow behind.

The author does not seem to note the contradiction inherent in the question of religion in this text. The fairy, a figure traditionally outside the sphere of Christianity, in this text appears to be Christianized. Although, on the one hand, she breaks the Church's doctrine on

sexual relations between the genders with her offer of a "free" sexual relationship and with her anti-marital stance, she on the other hand calls Christ her helper (v. 431-432) and takes care that Peterman does not miss the mass to which he is heading when they first meet (v. 499-451). Nonetheless, it is the fairy's position outside the sphere of Christianity that eventually leads to Peterman's unfaithfulness: his friends' claim that the fairy cannot be "ein rehtes wip" [a natural woman; v. 962] and the chaplain's assertion that she is in reality the devil in disguise prove enough to break his resistance. The fairy's refusal to become the object of the gaze of mortal men evokes the special suspicion of medieval society. Peterman's claim that the fairy allows nobody to look at her except him alone, "sü lat sich nieman sehen an / wan mich alterseine" [she lets nobody look at her except me alone; v. 932-33], is answered by his friends' univocal exclamation: "so ist sü nüt ein rehtez wip" [then she cannot be a natural woman; v. 935]. A woman who refuses to submit to the male gaze, who does not want to become the object of "frouwen schouwen," cannot belong to the realm of "normal" femininity. Thus we find in the figure of the fairy the often observed textual strategy of connecting unconventional female behaviour with fiendish powers, followed by the exclusion of this female from the realm of "normal" femininity. Yet, in contrast to the behaviour of Brünhild in the *Nibelungenlied*, the fairy's transgressions of the norms of medieval femininity are not only an expression of female "misbehaviour" that is generally "correctable," but they constitute an inherent feature of her "otherness." Not only does the fairy enter into a relationship with a man only on her own terms, thereby asserting her superior position in this relationship from the beginning, but she ends the relationship on her terms, too, thereby again occupying the traditional masculine position. The power of the female over the male in the

relationship between the fairy and Peterman is ultimately symbolized by her power over his life and death: she not only protects him during life, but in the end she also takes life from him, killing him rather than relinquishing her superior position in their relationship. The conclusion the reader is compelled to draw is that relationships with "other" women, seductive though they may seem at first glance, are ultimately doomed to fail. Furthermore, as the dramatic ending of the story shows, the fairy may prove fatal not only for a man's body but also for his soul.

1.2. Wild Women

a) *Wolfdietrich B*

Encounters between a courtly knight and his savage counterpart, the Wild Man, or even a knight's temporary transformation into a Wild Man, constitute a recurrent topic in medieval literature. As Roger Bartra in his *Wild Men in the Looking Glass* puts it, "the man we recognize as civilized has been unable to take a single step without the shadow of the wild man at his heel."²⁶ The Wild Man is an imaginary creature well-known in European literature ever since the Middle Ages. The Wild Woman, on the other hand, has been less present than her male counterpart, although she makes her appearance in Middle High German literature,

²⁶Bartra, 3.

too, where she fulfils different functions, such as that of the healer of the wounded, as in the *Eckenlied*, or the source of secret knowledge, as in *Kudrun*. In other texts, such as *Wolfdietrich* and *Ortnit*, she takes on more sinister roles. As will become clear from my following analysis of encounters between Christian knights and the Wild Woman in *Wolfdietrich B*, the Wild Woman, like the already discussed "supernatural" woman, often evokes ambiguous feelings, due to her ability to blur otherwise strictly demarcated boundaries.

The medieval forest is regarded as the Wild People's natural dwelling-place. As in the Staufenberg story, it is the forest, the uncanny place outside the boundaries of medieval civilization, that provides the setting for the first meeting between the Christian knight and the "other" woman, in this case between Wolfdietrich, the son of King Hugdietrich of Constantinople, and the Wild Woman called "rûhe" Else [i.e. shaggy, rough Else]. After a day-long battle against his two brothers, Wolfdietrich and his few surviving followers have been forced to retreat, and they decide to spend the night in a nearby forest. When Wolfdietrich offers to keep guard for his sleeping fellows, his duke Berhtunc tries to dissuade him from staying awake alone. Berhtunc warns him that he will be easy prey to a certain Wild Woman who has been following his movements for some years. Yet, despite Berhtunc's warning, Wolfdietrich does keep guard, and after midnight, when all his friends are asleep, the Wild Woman approaches him at the camp-fire: "Als sîn meister dô entslief, / dô kam daz rûhe wîp / zuo dem fiure gegangen" ["when his master had fallen asleep the rough woman came walking to the fire;" stanza 308]. In accordance with medieval tradition, the Wild Woman is portrayed as animal-like. Stanza 308 describes how she emerges from the dark

forest, crawling on all fours, her entire body covered with fur: "si gienc ûf allen vieren / reht sam si wære ein ber" ["she went on all four legs as if she were a bear;" stanza 308].²⁷ Her physical appearance violates the boundaries between the human and the animal so drastically that Wolfdietrich cries out in fear and surprise, automatically assuming that she can be no creature of God, but must have been sent by the devil--a notion that he formulates in stanza 308, when he shouts: "bistu gehiure? / welher tiuvel brât dich her?" ["are you natural? What devil brought you here?"].

Yet even more threatening than the Wild Woman's animal-like appearance proves to be her offer to give Wolfdietrich a kingdom if he agrees to make love to her--an offer that he rejects vehemently, and not without stressing the woman's assumed position outside the sphere of Christianity:

'Nein ich, ûf mîn triuwe' sprach dô Wolfdietrîch.
 'ja enwil ich dich niht minnen, du vâlantine rîch.
 du hebe dich zuo der helle, du bist des tiuvels gnôz:
 jâ müet mich âne mâzen dîn ungefüeger dôz.'

Wolfdietrich, stanza 310

[*On my faith, no!, said Wolfdietrich. I don't want to make love to you, you mighty devilish woman. Go to hell, you are the devil's comrade: your great noise distresses me terribly.*]

²⁷On the traditional physical appearance of the wild woman in the Middle Ages see Richard Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages: A Study in Art, Sentiment and Demonology* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1952), 1; Timothy Husband, *The Wild Man: Medieval Myth and Symbolism* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1980), 1 and Bartra, 88-90.

In this stanza alone, *Wolfdietrich* evokes devil and hell three times, thus relegating the Wild Woman to the realm of the non-Christian Other. As Bernheimer points out, the equation between wildness and the non-Christian Other constitutes a common theme in the Middle Ages:

The word [wildness] implied everything that eluded Christian norms and the established framework of Christian society, referring to what was uncanny, unruly, raw, unpredictable, foreign, uncultured, and uncultivated. It included the unfamiliar as well as the unintelligible. Just as the wilderness is the background against which medieval society is delineated, so wildness in the widest sense is the background of God's lucid order of creation.²⁸

Beyond this, the implied violation of sexual norms is bound to intensify *Wolfdietrich's*, and probably the audience's, unease. A sexual encounter with an animal-like woman, crawling on all fours, conjures up notions of bestiality. Like homosexuality, bestiality, this ultimate crossing of the boundaries between man and animal, was condemned as a "sin against nature" by the medieval Church:

In Western Christian tradition, bestiality--together with homosexual relations, *coitus interruptus*, and various other sexual acts or positions--was labeled as 'unnatural' and 'a sin against nature.' Nature referred to the hierarchical order of God's creation, where every living being had its determined and appropriate position. Crossing the boundaries of creation, or using a member not intended

²⁸Bernheimer, 19-20.

for procreative purposes, was a direct injury to God.²⁹

The gender role reversal implied in "rûhe" Else's active pursuit of Wolfdietrich is taken further in the course of the story. When Wolfdietrich insists on his refusal to engage in a sexual encounter with her, she resorts to magic charms in order not only to make him unconscious, but to take away his sword and his horse, symbols of his knighthood and his virility. Yet this act disturbs not only the power balance between Wolfdietrich and the Wild Woman, but also that between Wolfdietrich and his male comrades. In his "deprived" state, Wolfdietrich is no longer a match for his fellow knights, but takes on a feminized position in his relationship to the others in his homosocial circle. Deeply ashamed, he abandons them in their sleep and flees into the forest.

The power-relationship between the Wild Woman and Wolfdietrich, which by now clearly privileges the woman, changes even more when Wolfdietrich after a long march through the dark forest meets "rûhe" Else again. His demand that she should return his sword (and thus his masculinity and knighthood) is met by a second attempt at seduction. This time, the Wild Woman's approach is less sexually aggressive, yet not less threatening to Wolfdietrich's masculinity. When she notices his tiredness, she tries to sing him to sleep:

Si sprach: 'nu lege dich slâfen, du bist ein müeder man,
und lâz mich dir scheideln dîne löcke wunnesam.'

Wolfdietrich, stanza 316

²⁹Jonas Liliequist, "Peasants against Nature: Crossing the Boundaries between Man and Animal in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Sweden," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1 (1990/1): 393. On the role of the Christian Church in the discourse on bestiality, see also Joyce E. Salisbury, "Bestiality in the Middle Ages," in *Sex in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays*, ed. Joyce E. Salisbury (New York, London: Garland Publ., 1991), 173-186.

[*She said: "Lie down now and sleep, you are a tired man, and let me part your beautiful locks."*]

Her little "lullaby" puts Wolfdietrich in the position of a child, i.e. a man not yet sexually active. At the same time, the Wild Woman appears in the role of the mother, thus again inhabiting the more powerful position in their relationship. While so far her dominant, "masculine" position has been based on her aggressive sexuality and her ability to deprive Wolfdietrich of the symbols of his masculinity, it is now based on parental authority. For this reason it is hardly surprising that Wolfdietrich again refuses to surrender to the Wild Woman's seduction.

Yet this time Wolfdietrich's refusal costs him his sanity. The woman, angry, reduces him to a madman, and thereby removes him irrevocably from medieval courtly society:

Vor zorn nam si ein zouber und warf ez ûf den man:
 daz bestuont im an der brüste; slâfen in began,
 daz er muoste nider sîgen ûf den grüenen plân.
 do verschriet si im die negele, dem unverzagten man.
 Si nam des hârs zwên löcke von dem slâf hin dan
 si machte in zeinem tôren, den tugenthaften man.

Wolfdietrich, stanzas 317-18

[*Full of anger she cast a spell over the man which smote him on the breast and made him tired, so that he had to sink down on the green ground. Then she cut the bold man's nails and took two locks of his hair away from his temple. She made a fool of the virtuous man.*]

In many mythologies the human hair is regarded as the locus of masculine strength, human life and the human soul.³⁰ One only has to think of the Biblical story of Delilah and Samson to realize the importance of hair for masculine strength and potency. Through the removal of Wolfdietrich's two locks of hair, the Wild Woman thus not only renders him powerless as a man, but subjects him to her control. The complete reversal of gender roles is symbolized by "rûhe" Else's success in imprinting her own "wildness" on Wolfdietrich. She shapes him in her own image and thus takes possession of his very being. Moreover, by depriving Wolfdietrich of his reason, a specifically masculine character-trait, she feminizes him, making him senseless and animal-like, as only women were regarded in the Middle Ages. Stanza 318 describes how Wolfdietrich roams the forest in a state of insanity for half a year, taking his food from the ground. He has finally crossed the boundary between man and animal: he not only looks and acts like the Wild Woman, but he also shares her position at the margins of medieval society.

Yet, as clearly as this story describes the gradual disarmament of a man and the simultaneous empowerment of a woman, this state is not a permanent one. The text reassures its audience that this kind of reversed power-relationship between the genders constitutes no ultimate threat to a faithful Christian man. After half a year of insanity, Wolfdietrich is not only released from his desolate state through the intervention of God, but at the same time the Wild Woman is integrated into the Christian system. In this process she is forced to relinquish her "un-natural," "un-feminine" power over the knight. Through the rite of baptism

³⁰Hanns Bächtold Stäubli, "Haar," *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, ed. Hanns Bächtold Stäubli, vol. 3 (Berlin and Leipzig: de Gruyter, 1930/1931), 1258.

she is transformed into a courtly lady: she loses her outlandish, animal-like appearance and becomes the beautiful "frou Sigminne." The Wild Woman's name change points to the erasure of the most disturbing trait of the female non-Christian "other," indicated by the adjective "rûhe," namely the "undisciplined" (or uncivilized) use of sexuality. In its place appears the refined concept of courtly love, indicated by the name "Sigminne," i.e. the victory of courtly love. As "frou Sigminne" the Wild Woman has to, and happily does, resign herself to the traditional role of the medieval noblewoman. Her subsequent marriage to Wolfdietrich restricts her sexuality even further. The promiscuous Wild Woman, who freely roamed the forests in search of attractive knights to satisfy her desires, is transformed into a medieval house-wife, whose body is rightfully owned by only one man, namely her husband, Wolfdietrich.

This story portrays a comparatively intimate relationship between the male Christian Self and the female non-Christian "other"--a relationship that eventually results in the Wild Woman's transformation into a Christian courtly lady. Other encounters between courtly knights and Wild Women in this epic often negate the possibility of a closer relationship between the civilized world and its savage counterpart. This, however, does not mean that these other Wild Women are permitted to exist unchallenged in their realm. As the following two examples show, the Wild Woman can be "neutralized" by means other than assimilation.

Many Wild Women are depicted as aggressive less in a sexual respect than with respect to pure physical brutality, a feature that they share with their male counterparts, the Wild Men. For example, the Wild Woman/Giantess called "frou" Runze (i.e. Mrs. Wrinkle), wife of the Wild Man/Giant Helle, is no less brutal than her husband. Her unattractiveness

lies not only in her unusual body-size, but also in her age. Her very name, "Mrs Wrinkle," indicates that she is, or looks like, an old woman, which means that she is automatically ugly by medieval standards. In a fight against the emperor Ortnit, Helle manages to render the latter unconscious with a blow from his sword. Believing that he has killed the "kaiser," he calls his wife to the scene of the fight. In the usual fashion of the Wild People, "frou" Runze's armament consists of a big pole, indicating her brute and unknighly state. When Ortnit suddenly jumps up and chops off Helle's legs, his wife rushes to his help, this time armed with a young tree. Stanza 505 offers an impressive picture of her physical strength:

Si swanc in über die ahsel, seht, daz wil ich iu sagen:
 den enmöchte von swære ein wagen nimmer haben getragen
 die tolden und die este liez si hangen dran:
 dô huop si sich vil balde zuo der linden dan.

Wolfdietrich, stanza 505

[She swung it over her shoulder: look, this is what I want to tell you : no wagon could have carried it because of its weight. She left the treetop and the branches on it and hurried to the lime- tree.]

Although "frou" Runze's position as a wife indicates her status as a sexual being, her relationship to the knight Ortnit is characterized neither by sexuality nor sexual charms, but exclusively by hostility and brute force. "Frou" Runze's attitude toward the courtly world differs in no point from that of her husband. Nevertheless, the reaction of the courtly world to the Wild Woman's power, be it sexual, as in "rûhe" Else, or physical, as in "frou" Runze, remains the same: like *Wolfdietrich*, Ortnit automatically assumes a connection between the

Wild Woman and the devil, and he implores God, the traditional Christian counter-force, to stand by his side. Fortunately for Ortnit, God seems to hear his prayer. "Frou" Runze finally dies by Ortnit's sword, after first accidentally killing her own husband. While "rûhe" Else dies a symbolic death through her baptism, "frou" Runze dies a physical death in her fight against Ortnit. In both cases, however, the strange Wild Woman is erased from the map of the medieval world.

A third encounter between a knight and a Wild Woman in the epic *Wolfdietrich B* presents the female non-Christian "other" from yet another perspective, thus pointing to the flexibility of the Wild Woman image in Middle High German literature. Stanzas 842-848 relate how Wolfdietrich in the company of a noble lady traverses a forest on his way to a town called Garten. Suddenly he hears a sad voice calling. Leaving the noblewoman behind, he begins to search for the source of the calls. What he eventually finds is a Wild Woman in labour. In contrast to "rûhe" Else and "frou" Runze, this Wild Woman, who remains nameless, is extremely reserved. She politely rejects Wolfdietrich's offer to assist her at the birth by pointing out that no man should be allowed to see the secret regions of a woman's body: "ir sult von mir gan: / ez ensulnt niht mannes ougen / frowen tougen sehen an" [you shall leave me, no man's eyes should look at the secret parts of a woman; stanza 844]. Yet Wolfdietrich sees no reason for her shame and convinces her to accept his help. The delivery of the Wild Woman's baby is then described in the following words: "Dô gienc die wilde frouwe / undr ein boum ûf ein gras. / eins schœnen degenkindes / diu frouwe dô genas" [then the Wild Woman sank down on the grass under a tree, and she gave birth to a beautiful warrior's child]. This public way of giving birth in the open, lying on the ground and

unassisted by other women, puts the young mother on a par with the female animal. And while "rûhe" Else and "frou" Runze lose their "masculine" powers mainly because of divine intervention, the nameless wild mother becomes a victim of her own female nature: she dies directly after the delivery, and is only a little later followed by her child. She literally becomes what Tiffany and Adams have called "a victim of her biological destiny."³¹ And here again, death eliminates the threatening presence of the female "other."

All three described encounters indicate that the Wild Woman, dangerous though she may seem at first glance, is not allowed to pose any ultimate threat to medieval Christian civilization. Yet that does not mean that she is without power. As becomes especially obvious in the relationship between Wolfdietrich and "rûhe" Else, the Wild Woman stands for the omnipresence of nature -- inside as well as outside the human being. The power that "rûhe" Else exerts over Wolfdietrich indicates that his state of civilization is more fragile than he would care to admit. For this reason, not only Wolfdietrich himself, but also the medieval audience, need the assurance that the powers of the wilderness are restricted, or, as Hayden White puts it, "the relatively comforting thought that the Wild Man [...] exists out there and can be contained by some kind of physical action."³² In all the discussed encounters between courtly knights and Wild Women, it is the Christian God and (female) nature that ultimately restrict the Wild Woman's power. The following example from the Middle High German

³¹Sharon W. Tiffany, and Kathleen J. Adams, *The Wild Woman: An Inquiry into the Anthropology of an Idea* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Schenkman, 1985), 19.

³²Hayden White, "The Forms of Wildness: Archaeology of An Idea," in *The Wild Man Within: An Image in Western Thought from the Renaissance to Romanticism*, ed. Edward Dudley and Maximillian E. Novak (Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh Press, 1972), 7.

Eckenlied emphasizes not only the Wild Woman's powerlessness, but at the same time points to one of her traditional sources of power: secret knowledge.

b) *Eckenlied*

One of the most dramatic scenes of the *Eckenlied*³³ is the chase of the Wild Damsel, "daz wilde vrouwelîn." Dietrich, who has just killed Ecke in a knightly duel and is himself suffering from severe injuries, is suddenly surprised by a tumult. He stumbles upon a Wild Damsel, who is being chased by Vâsolt, Ecke's brother, and his followers. When the Wild Damsel implores him to help her, Dietrich agrees to protect her, and a little later both of them encounter an irate Vâsolt. Vâsolt's demand that Dietrich should not interfere with his business clearly reveals the damsel's position as less than human, as female prey:

'du hâst genomen mir mîn meit'
 sprach dô des landes herre.
 'wie kûme ich dirz vertragen mac!
 Ich hâns gejaget disen tac
 ûz dem gebirge verre.
 von wannân bistu her bekommen?

³³"Eckenlied," in *Dietrichs Abenteuer*, ed. Julius Zupitza, Deutsches Heldenbuch 5 (Dublin, Zürich: Weidmann, 1968), 217-264. All quotations are taken from this edition.

daz du mir mîn wilt hâst genomen?

Eckenlied, stanza 167

["You took my damsel away!" said the lord of the country. "I can hardly allow you that! I have chased her today from the far-away mountains. Where have you come from? Who told you that you should take my prey?"]

The MHG terms "jagen" (to hunt) and "wilt" (prey) indicate the Wild Damsel's status as an animal rather than a human being. Consequently, she is hunted like an animal, even chased by dogs, as stanza 248 reveals. Even though the Wild Damsel herself has no explanation for Vâsolt's actions, Dietrich assumes, probably quite accurately, that the king wants to rob the Wild Woman of her honour, i.e. force her to have sexual intercourse with him. Yet it is also possible that Vâsolt wants to kill her outright. As Bernheimer points out, the chase of the Wild Damsel is a well-known literary motif, often resulting in the gruesome death of the victim, who might end up torn to pieces.³⁴ Even though the Wild Damsel claims that she is "ein gotes bilde," i.e. God's creature, and the text portrays her as a beautiful woman, there seems to be a connection between her status as "other" and her cruel treatment by Vâsolt. Dietrich's half astonished, half angry comment in stanza 173: "in hôrte nie von ritter daz / man frouwen jagen solde" [he has never before heard from a knight that one should hunt ladies], points to the special position the Wild Woman inhabits in the relationship between the genders. The natural vulnerability of the medieval woman is highlighted by the Wild Damsel, who because of her status as "other" cannot even claim the fragile protection noblewomen are usually granted by courtly convention. Thus, she serves to emphasize the

³⁴Bernheimer, 129.

vulnerability of the female in the face of aggressive masculinity. And like "rûhe" Else and the other Wild Women, the Wild Damsel is not permitted to remain undisturbed in her realm, the far-away mountains. The wild chase ultimately destroys the threatening presence of the female non-Christian "other," while at the same time denigrating the Wild People's "life-style." As the Wild Damsel herself puts it in stanza 171: "mîn hôhez leben von wilder art / hât er gemachet nidere" [my noble and wild life has he made contemptuous].

Yet, despite her female vulnerability in the face of male aggression, the Wild Damsel wields a specific form of power. It is she who with the help of her "wilde meisterschaft" [wild skills] manages to cure her saviour, Dietrich, from his wounds. Her relationship with Dietrich, which so far has not deviated from the traditional power-relationship between the genders, shifts somewhat in her favour when she cures not only him, but his horse. Even though she uses her secret knowledge positively here, it makes her a potential danger to the civilized world, uninitiated into the "wilde meisterschafte."

The Wild Damsel in the *Eckenlied* has a chance to escape not only Vâsolt but also the threats of civilization when Dietrich and Vâsolt are finally reconciled and set her free to go her own way--presumably back to the mountains from whence she was driven in the wild chase. Yet, even though she is allowed to survive this time, the text has managed to outline the ambivalent position of the male Christian Self to the female non-Christian "other," ranging from outright hostility on Vâsolt's part to reluctant helpfulness on the part of Dietrich. Furthermore, confronted with the relentless wild chase, the medieval (and modern) audience is left in little doubt about the Damsel's eventual fate. Finally, even though she is permitted to survive (for the moment), she is pushed from the scene of events. She vanishes

from the story--only to be succeeded by two other Wild Women/giantesses, who turn out to be Vâsolt's mother Birkhilt and his sister Uodelgard. Their "otherness," too, is symbolized by their connection with the devil: "valantinne" and "tieval's genoz" are two terms with which the non-Christian "other" is described. Just like "frou" Runze in *Wolfdietrich B*, Birkhilt and Uodelgard display only hostility toward the warrior, albeit this time for a specific reason: Vâsolt, even though pretending to be loyal to Dietrich, in fact sacrifices him to the wrath of the mother when introducing Dietrich as the killer of her son Ecke. The fight between Dietrich and the two Wild Women/giantesses, who, in accordance with tradition, live in a castle in the middle of a forest, turns out to be similar to that between Ortnit and "frou" Runze: it is savage and bloody, fought with young trees, poles and, occasionally, the sword. Mother Birkhilt is cleft in two by Dietrich's sword, and when her daughter hears her dying cry, she rushes to her help, armed with a young tree. The manuscript version E1 in the *Heldenbuch* breaks off in the middle of the struggle between Dietrich and Uodelgard, at the moment when Dietrich manages to grab her by her hair. Although we do not know the rest of the manuscript, we can assume that he kills her, too, since other manuscript versions mention that he eventually arrives at his destination, the court of the three queens. Like the Wild Women in *Wolfdietrich B*, Birkhilt and Uodelgard are eliminated from the medieval world by death.

1.3. Heathen Women

a) Der Stricker: *Die Königin vom Mohrenland*

Der Stricker's *Die Königin vom Mohrenland*³⁵ offers the reader a comparison between two queens, one described as a Christian and the other as a heathen, who rule over countries adjacent to each other. This means that the geographical boundary between the two kingdoms also constitutes the boundary between the realms of the Self and the "other." The difference between the women is symbolized by their physical appearance, evaluated as ugly or beautiful by the narrator. Their physical appearance is furthermore linked to their character, as well as to their position with regard to the Christian religion. While the heathen queen is never described as a person, the Christian queen is praised as fair and beautiful: "rosen var und li[l]gen var / was ir vil minneclicher lip: / si was ein wol gemachet wip, / ir lop erschal in elliu land" [her lovely body had the colour of rose and lily; she was a shapely woman and she was praised in all countries; v. 6-9]. The heathen's outer appearance can be deduced only from her introduction as the ruler of a country in which everybody, men as well as women, are black:

ez het ein heidenin

³⁵Der Stricker, "Die Königin vom Mohrenland," in *Die Kleindichtung des Strickers*, ed. Wolfgang Wilfried Moelleken et al., vol. 2, Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik 107 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1974), 236-242. All quotations from *Die Königin vom Mohrenland* are from this edition. For an overview of the depiction of heathens in pre-courtly German epics, see Hans Szklenar, *Studien zum Bild des Orients in vorhöfischen deutschen Epen*, Palaestra 243 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966).

bi der vrowen lange ein lant;
 swaz man liute dar inne vant,
 ez wær man ode wip,
 die heten alle swarzen lip.

Die Königin..., v. 19-22.

[*For a long time a heathen woman had a country adjacent to that of the lady;
 whatever kind of people one found therein, be it man or woman, had a black
 body.*]

Although the author does not *expressis verbis* describe the black queen as ugly, he implies such a judgment by countering his lengthy praise of the Christian queen's beauty with a lack of comment on the physical qualities of the heathen queen.

Furthermore, it has to be borne in mind that the colour black constitutes not only an "ethnic" signifier, but signifies the "other" woman's position outside the sphere of Christianity, i.e. her status as a heathen, "ein heidenin." This position in its turn is connected to the realm of the devil, who, to use Jeffrey Richards's phrase, "is the ultimate 'Other,' the inspirer of evil, the antithesis of the Christian God."³⁶ Apart from that, black is the colour traditionally associated with the devil. Before the heathen queen is introduced, the story relates that the devil's messengers are bound to destroy the Christian queen's happiness, so that when a few lines later it is said that the heathen queen sends a great troop of black women into the Christian queen's country the reader assumes that the heathen queen and the devil are one and the same person, or at least that she functions as his messenger. Thus the

³⁶Richards, 21.

colour black has a double meaning in this context: it works as an "ethnic" signifier, distinguishing the black woman from the white woman, and it is at the same time used as a religious and moral signifier, placing the heathen queen in a certain position on the scale between "good" and "bad," moral and immoral, Christendom and Heathendom. Although the Bible depicts female Africans as neither ugly nor "bad,"³⁷ early Biblical exegesis does promote the equation of "black" and "bad," and offers several explanations for its negative judgment of black-skinned people:

In der Bibelexegese werden Afrikaner entweder als Nachkommen Kains (Schwärze als Kainsmal) oder als Nachkommen von Noahs Sohn Ham (Schwärze als Fluch) verstanden. Selten erscheinen Zitate in einem direkten Verhältnis zu nur einer Quelle; und in der Tat fließen seit dem Beginn christlicher Literatur biblische und antike Urteile und Vorurteile nicht nur einmal, sondern immer wieder, in stereotyper Form oder in individueller Variation, ineinander.³⁸

Yet the colour of the skin constitutes an inherently unstable signifier, as becomes obvious in the ensuing events. As it turns out, the black female messengers, who despite their blackness obviously exert a quite considerable sexual influence on the Christian knights,

³⁷Andreas Mielke: *Nigra Sum Et Formosa: Afrikanerinnen in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters* (Stuttgart: helfant, 1992), 81-82.

³⁸Mielke, 72: "In Biblical exegesis Africans are understood either as descendants of Cain (blackness as mark of Cain) or as descendants of Noah's son Ham (blackness as curse). It is rare that quotations appear in relationship to only one source, and indeed, from the beginnings of Christian literature, Biblical and classical judgments and prejudices merge not only once but time and again either in a stereotypical way or in individual variation."

manage to convert a great many of them to what the text calls "ungelouben," a term that does not stand for any alternative religion, but describes *ex negativo* all positions outside the Christian faith, "glouben." This conversion has consequences that are literally inscribed on the bodies of the converted: upon their conversion the Christian knights "change their colour," to become as black as their non-Christian "seductresses":

swen si uber wunden,
daz er ir leben ane gie,
der wart swarz als sie
und wart in gar gehorsam.

Die Königin..., v. 30-33.

[Whomever they convinced to follow their way of life became black as they themselves and obeyed them.]

In this passage the conversion entails not only a change of colour, from the "white" of Christianity to the infidel's (and the devil's) black, but also a gender role reversal: upon their conversion the white men are subjected to the power of the black women. By depicting black heathen women as seductresses and converters of white Christian men, the text merges the realms of the feminine and the non-Christian / non-white, thus equating the female "other" with the ethnic "other," while at the same time portraying Christianity as predominantly "masculine."

The important part sexuality plays in this encounter emerges not only from the fact that "otherness" here is described as feminine and overtly sexualized, but also from the comparison between the (feminine) powers of the Christian queen and the heathen queen,

which constitutes the *pointe* of this *maere*. The Christian knights upon their conversion lose their male superiority and yield to the sexual powers of their seductresses, a gender role reversal which not untypically is embedded in a general picture of a world "upside down," in which the traditional order is overthrown and courtly rules of conduct are violated:

also chom ein tugentloser sit;
do wart diu werlt vercheret mit,
daz man verschamter wibe phlach.
swelhe riter bi den gern lach,
der wart zehoher minne enwiht
und enahte uf die vrowen niht.
daz swartze heideniche leben
hat sich manigen riter geben
der hohe minne hat verchorn.

Die Königin... v. 87-95

[Then came unvirtuous customs which turned the world upside down so that men had relations with shameless women. Whichever knight liked to lie with them gave up courtly love and did not care for courtly ladies any more. Many a knight who had turned away from courtly love gave himself up to the black heathen life.]

This passage contrasts unrestrained sexuality with courtly love. In the process, the female non-Christian "other" is sexualized, while the Christian queen represents the more refined feminine powers, which are symbolized by the concept of courtly love. Although the

power of both queens derives primarily from their femininity and both are portrayed as rulers over their male followers, the nature of their power is as different as their religious and ethnic signifiers. The Christian knights, on the other hand, find themselves between two opposite sources of power, an opposition that is skilfully exploited in the text. As the narrator claims, the knights' conversion is not solely due to the seductive powers of "otherness" but to a certain degree to the Christian queen's shortcomings as a courtly lady, too. Although the Christian queen has a natural interest in keeping the knights under her power, she is not willing to give any signs of gratitude for the knights' faithfulness to herself and their common Christian God. For this reason, the text claims, many otherwise faithful knights are driven away from the queen and the Christian religion. Thus responsibility for the knights' behaviour is shared by the two queens, with the Christian queen playing into the hands of the sexual forces of heathendom. Not only are the knights relieved from every burden of responsibility for their actions, but the queens are played off against each other. Although the heathen queen appears morally inferior to the Christian queen, she still has an important function as a means of punishment of the Christian queen, whose mode of conduct is criticised in this text. While the heathen queen and her female followers are described as too generous in their sexual favours, the Christian queen is admonished for being too reserved. Courtly love as represented by the Christian queen proves insufficient to control the knights as successfully as is done by the sexuality of her heathen counterpart. The knights, who despite, or because of, the rules of courtly love display considerable power in their relationship with the Christian queen by threatening to abandon her if she does not show more gratitude (v. 44-49), are at the same time portrayed as helpless victims in the hands of those "other" women who manage to

convert them to their life "in churcen stunden" [in a short time; v. 29]. The gender role reversal characteristic of courtly love is exposed as merely playful, not only by the knights' abandonment of their Christian queen but even more clearly by the knights' loss of power in the hands of the "other" women.

Thus, as so often in medieval literature, female power is linked to female sexuality, which in its turn is regarded as instigated by anti-Christian forces, symbolized by the figure of the devil. In the case of the heathen woman, however, the triad power/sexuality/devil is supplemented by "ethnic" features. Woman as Other becomes the "other" woman, who stands in opposition not only to the man, but also to "normal" femininity. In her encounter with the male world, the heathen woman in this story demonstrates forces of dominion superior to those of the Christian woman, expressed through her power to imprint her own black colour on a knight and thereby to officially take possession of him, to make him her "own." Unlike Peterman in *Der Ritter von Staufenberg*, however, the knights in *Die Königin vom Mohrenland* are not made responsible for their "unmanliness" in relationship to their heathen "dominatrix." On the contrary, the text shifts the blame to the female protagonists by placing as much importance on the comparison between the two categories of woman as on their respective power-relationship with the male gender.

b) *Wolfdietrich B*

Female sexuality also plays a dominant part in the encounter between Wolfdietrich, the Christian King of Constantinople, and the unnamed daughter of a fierce heathen king. This heathen resides in a castle in a place called "Falkenise," eleven days journey from Wolfdietrich's residence in "Troyen." Upon his arrival at Falkenise, Wolfdietrich gets a glimpse of the non-Christian's dangerousness, when he is confronted with the sights of the foreign castle, "adorned" with the heads of five-hundred dead knights whom the heathen has defeated in a knife-throwing contest. As in the stories of "other" women already discussed, the Christian knight has to travel abroad in order to meet the female non-Christian "other." The cultural distance between Christian and non-Christian is here symbolized by the time that Wolfdietrich needs to travel before he arrives at the heathen's castle. In the case of the heathen princess, too, "otherness" is linked with female sexuality, and as in *Die Königin vom Mohrenland*, the "other" woman's sexuality fulfils a specific function. From the beginning, the heathen princess takes a personal interest in Wolfdietrich, whom she regards as the most attractive man among heathens and Christians alike: "daz ir under heidn noch kristen / geviel nie keiner baz" [nobody pleased her more among heathens and Christians; stanza 548]. The heathen princess's personal interest in the Christian knight prompts her to protect him against her father's challenge to enter a knife throwing contest. She threatens that if Wolfdietrich is defeated she will convert to Christianity. At this, the heathen consents to postpone the contest and orders Wolfdietrich to spend the night with his daughter; but he attempts to trick him by offering him a sleeping potion meant to ensure Wolfdietrich's defeat in the knife-throwing

contest scheduled for the following day. Again, the heathen princess saves Woldietrich when she throws the glass away before he touches it.

The subsequent scene in the bed-chamber reveals again the intimate association the text makes between female "otherness" and female sexuality. The fact that the heathen king offers his daughter for his guest's sexual pleasure, and the daughter's own sexual desire, which makes her more than willing to obey her father, are meant to emphasize the innate "immorality" of both the heathens. This impression is strengthened by the woman's active sexual advances towards Woldietrich, clearly violating medieval gender roles and differing greatly from the behaviour expected of a Christian lady. Moreover, this scene offers a frank description of the female "other's" anatomy and how she uses her body in order to arouse male sexual desire, one of her greatest sources of power. After she has taken off her clothing, she cunningly starts to seduce him:

si stuond für in anz bette, die künegîn hôchgemuot.

si legte ir schoëniu brüstel ûf den fürsten guot.

wîz wâren ir hende, entdeckt was ir scham:

si sprach "du werder ritter, sich frouwen êre vor dir an."

Woldietrich, stanza 569

[The high-spirited queen stepped up to the bed and put her beautiful little breasts on the duke. Her hands were white and her private parts were revealed. She said: "You noble knight, look at women's honour before you."]

The princess not only undresses and offers herself to the male gaze, but she puts her breast on Woldietrich's body--breasts which the narrator praises as beautiful and small. The reader

might be surprised that this description offers no "ethnic" markers which would distinguish the heathen queen outwardly from the Christian noblewoman. On the contrary: the only colour mentioned here is "white," which refers to the heathen's hands, and later, in stanza 577, it is said that "ir wîziu wengel lûhten an der selben stat / reht als diu liehte rôse swenn si êrste ûf gât" [her little white cheeks were shining like a bright rose that blossoms for the first time]. White, on the other hand, is, as it turns out later, also the colour of Wolfdietrich's own hands. Thus, in his attempt to explain the heathen's attractiveness for Wolfdietrich (and presumably make her attractive to the listener or reader) the narrator suppresses any physical signs of her difference, making her similar to a Christian lady. Wolfdietrich's earlier claim that he has never seen a Christian woman more beautiful than the heathen princess, turns out to be less an appraisal of the inherent beauty of "otherness," than a confirmation of conventional, Christian courtly beauty, the kind of beauty that the black queen in *Die Königin vom Mohrenland* obviously lacks. Nonetheless, the heathen princess's overt and, by the standards of the time, aggressive sexual behaviour links her with the black queen in Der Stricker's *maere*, and is meant to distinguish the "other" woman from the Christian ideal of femininity. Thus the boundaries between Christian and non-Christian women are upheld.

Yet, despite the heathen woman's conventional beauty, Wolfdietrich is not so easily seduced: although the text admits that he is strongly attracted by her beauty (stanza 548), and his attraction is certainly strengthened by the sight and touch of her naked body, he refuses her offer of sexual intercourse on grounds of her heathen religion. After a lengthy debate in which each unsuccessfully tries to convert the other, the heathen embarks on a second attempt at seduction, which turns out to be even more aggressive than the previous one:

dô greif si alsô schiere nâch sîner wîzen hant:
 si leite ims tugentlîchen dâ si ir brüstel vant.
 Ir bein huop si ûf hôhe und leite ez über in.

Wolfdietrich, stanza 581-82

[*Then she grabbed his white hand very fast and put it on her little breast. She lifted her leg high and laid it on top of him.*]

This erotic scene serves two purposes: firstly, it links the spheres of conversion to heathendom and sexual seduction by a female "other," and secondly, it symbolizes the gender role reversal characteristic of the relationship between male Christian Self and female non-Christian "other." While *Wolfdietrich* in his attempts at conversion has to rely solely on the power of his words, the heathen speaks primarily through her body. As already observed in *Die Königin vom Mohrenland*, heathen religion and conversion to heathendom are expressed in terms of sexual seduction, thereby implicitly relegating the non-Christian religion to the realm of the carnal, the sinful (female) body.

At the same time, this second attempt at seduction shows the reader how the heathen woman is trying to secure a position of power in the relationship between the genders, represented by the act of putting her leg over *Wolfdietrich*'s body, thereby achieving the superior, "masculine" position in the planned sexual intercourse. This last act now provokes a reaction on the part of *Wolfdietrich*, which is unfortunately partly lost due to a gap in the manuscript. Demanding that she put something (maybe the leg?) either "there" or "away," *Wolfdietrich* exclaims that he would rather remain without the love of women for the rest of his life than consent to love her. Unlike in the *Königin vom Mohrenland*, in this text the

Christian's aversion to conversion overrides the sexual attraction he feels for the female non-Christian "other." An intimate relationship between the male Christian Self and the female non-Christian "other" is depicted as so impossible that in a later scene Wolfdietrich risks losing his life rather than agreeing to join the followers of "machmet."

Another characteristic of the heathen woman is her ability to perform magic, an ability which she has in common with the fairy and the Wild Woman. After her father has lost the knife-throwing contest and has been killed by Wolfdietrich, the woman tries to prevent his escape by conjuring up a wild sea around the castle. When Wolfdietrich forces her onto his horse, threatening that she will have to die together with him, she magically creates a bridge of glass. Wolfdietrich attempts to escape over this bridge, which, however, collapses when he reaches the middle. While the woman suddenly takes on the shape of a magpie and thus saves herself, Wolfdietrich has to struggle for his survival. Yet God lends him support. When Wolfdietrich finally decides to jump off the bridge, he finds himself on a green plain instead of in the wild waters. Nevertheless, he is still not safe. Upon his renewed refusal to convert to "machmet," the heathen queen conjures up twelve devils who attack him. This reveals the source of the heathen princess's magic power by pointing to the well-known connection between the realms of the non-Christian and the devil. And, as the narrator comments in a rather resigned tone, as if this was not enough of the princess's magic, the devils multiply even as Wolfdietrich kills them. It is only after he has defeated seventy-two devils that he can start to climb up a hill, which he, with God's help, reaches on the third day. After he has escaped a burning forest, the last act of the princess's magic, he is finally released from her powers and the episode ends.

The princess's magic charms are not a characteristically "feminine" skill, yet magic is restricted to the realm of the non-Christian, male or female. As a means by which power over others can be exerted, magic becomes important especially in the encounters between the genders, since a woman's use of magic can shift the power-relationship between the genders in her favour. As the story demonstrates, the heathen princess is able to punish Wolfdietrich for his rejection and torment him so vigorously that only his faith in the Christian God can save him from the forces of this "other" femininity. The connection the text makes between the use of magic and the devil (or rather devils, since the heathen woman is able to conjure up as many as seventy-two of them) not only provides the reader with an explanation of the source of magic, but links the non-Christian "other" to the devil. This connection with the devil is shared by supernatural women, Wild Women and heathen women. Of course, as already pointed out in the context of dominant women like Brünhild in the *Nibelungenlied*, blaming the devil for a woman's "unwomanly" strength and a possible resulting reversal of gender roles might be regarded as a strategy to explain "deviant" female role behaviour, and to exonerate male failures in "handling" such women. Yet while the "normal" woman's violation of gender norms is usually regarded as a kind of "accident" or an illness that can be remedied, "other" women very often keep their power, even if they do not succeed completely in achieving their goal, which often seems to be the subjection of Christian knights to their power. Even though the heathen princess depicted in this tale does not manage to convert Wolfdietrich to "machmet," she herself is equally unwilling to be converted to Christianity. While many of her heathen followers accept baptism after the death of their king, the princess to the end refuses to be integrated into the Christian system. Only

in this way can the "other" woman survive: at the end of the story she is only left behind, not hurt or killed, and is thus able to find other "victims" for her sexuality and magic charms.

1.4. Old Women

a) *Alten Weibes List*

... At center stage, hideous and indomitably powerful in her wheelchair, she choreographs the traffic of love, selling girls to boys, youth to age, woman to woman, man to man.

Nancy Huston³⁹

The old body is depicted ambivalently in medieval German literature. The process of aging and the state of old age evoked both negative and positive connotations in the medieval mind.

As Shulamith Shahar explains:

aging was considered conducive to increased wisdom, and to spiritual growth, as well as to liberation from passions and earthly ambitions. But it was also a time of development of negative traits of character, and even of vices, as well

³⁹Nancy Huston, *Slow Emergencies* (Boston, New York, Toronto, London: Little, Brown and Company, 1996), 216.

as of mental deterioration.⁴⁰

The old woman receives negative treatment in literature more often than her male counterpart. That does not mean, however, that there are no depictions of wise old women at all. Kriemhild's mother Uote in the *Nibelungenlied* is only one example of a wise old mother-figure. As was seen in my above discussion, Uote is depicted as a positive force, whose advice is sought and welcomed by her children and friends. More often, however, the reader is presented with negative images of old women. The "old she-wolf" Gerlint in *Kudrun* offers a striking example of the darkly threatening forces an old woman is suspected to wield over those unlucky enough to be subjected to her power. The most fruitful source of research into the image of the old woman is neither the heroic epic nor the courtly romance, however, but the medieval *maere*. A quick glance through Friedrich Heinrich von der Hagen's *Gesamtabenteuer*, for example, presents the reader with a considerable number of old women, the majority of whom are "evil" in one way or the other.

The reason for the ambivalent treatment of the old woman is, to some degree, to be found in the social class to which she usually belongs: it is certainly no coincidence that many of the negatively depicted old woman figures belong to the peasantry. One only has to think of Neidhart von Reuenthal's *Sommerlieder* to realize the freedom male writers take in their depiction of older peasant women, who are at times ridiculous, at times dangerous. It might be assumed that authors such as Neidhart did not have the same freedom to express possible negative sentiments against the old women belonging to their own social class, the nobility, regardless of their "true" feelings. This different treatment of old women according

⁴⁰Shulamith Shahar, "The Old Body in Medieval Culture," in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, 160.

to their societal background does not seem to take into account one important physiological explanation medieval medicine offered for the old woman's harmfulness, namely the cessation of the menstrual flow:

As is well known, menstrual blood was considered impure, harmful and possessing destructive power. After the menopause woman was even more dangerous because she had become incapable of eliminating the superfluous matter from her organism.⁴¹

One cannot help but wonder why these changes to the negative, connected as they are to female physiology, could have been restricted to a specific social class. And yet, aspects of class clearly override biological factors, even if only in literary representations. As in the case of courtly love, old female members of the nobility are more protected from male literary expressions of misogyny than women of the lower classes. This distinction between classes is never drawn in the case of the old male body, probably because the male body was never considered as inherently harmful as the female one and thus did not receive so much negative treatment in the first place. Nevertheless, as we have seen in the case of Gerlint in *Kudrun*, distinguished social class does not guarantee the absence of "bad" old women. A woman who steps over the line, who transgresses gender boundaries and behaves in a way she is not supposed to, might turn out to be as harmful to medieval patriarchal society as the stereotypical old hag "who concocts philtres of love and death."⁴²

Regardless of class and upbringing, however, the medieval old woman fits the image

⁴¹Shahar, "The Old Body," 163.

⁴²Ibid., 163.

of the "other" woman. As Lois Banner has formulated it on the basis of de Beauvoir, "to be a woman other than young in Western culture is to be twice over 'the other'."⁴³ If one considers that, as indicated above, many of the old women depicted in medieval German literature belong to the lower classes, this "otherness" becomes even more pronounced. With respect to the peasant woman, one could extend de Beauvoir's definition once more and argue that the old peasant woman is three times the "other"--as a woman, as a peasant and as an aged person. Although at first glance the old woman seems to be more integrated into medieval society than the supernatural woman, the Wild Woman and the heathen woman, she is, ultimately, as much on the fringes as her "other" sisters. Being beyond her reproductive years, and, most often, beyond the sexual interest of men, the old woman loses her importance for the patriarchal system, becomes dispensable, and thus very often as "invisible" to medieval society as those "other" women already, or still, "out there."

Even though the above observations suggest that there is little room for encounters between younger men and old women from different social classes, these encounters not only do occur, but are often eroticized, even if more indirectly than in the encounters between Christian knights and "other" women. It is sexuality that frequently brings old women and young men from different classes together, even though the old woman more often than not acts as the mediator of sexual desire rather than as a sex-partner herself. As will become clear from the following analysis of *Alten Weibes List*, the old woman's active role in the initiation of sexual encounters between young people and her control over the ongoing erotic events

⁴³Lois W. Banner, *In Full Flower: Aging Women, Power, and Sexuality* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1992), 6.

not only grant her power, but sexualize her own relationship with the two participants.

In the *maere Alten Weibes List*,⁴⁴ female wisdom takes on a negative, even sinister meaning. The main protagonist is an old woman who works as a "werberinne," or "hechel," in its literal sense meaning a mischievous woman, often denoting a match-maker. "Mechele," an expression the narrator uses later in the text, is another Middle High German word for the female match-maker. The narrator introduces her as an extremely skilful old woman, who brings male and female lovers together and who has already managed to arrange many a secret affair. Hence this old woman, though not an active participant in the erotic exchange, wields considerable power in the "business-side" of love, her own reward being financial instead of (immediate) sexual gratification.

Unlike other women in medieval German literature, the protagonist of this *maere* seems to have accepted the limitations of her aged body in so far as she does not attempt to initiate love-affairs on her own behalf. This reluctance contrasts her well to the old women presented in other texts--for example, in some of Neidhart's *Sommerlieder*. Here, the old women's frantic search for lovers who might satisfy the needs of their old, often repulsive bodies makes them easy targets for the smirks and laughter of the male courtly audience for whose benefit the *Lieder* were invented. One of the best-known examples of Neidhart's treatment of the old peasant women may be found in the following *Sommerlied*:

⁴⁴Konrad von Würzburg, "Alten Weibes List," in *Gesamtabenteuer*, vol. 1, 189-205. In Friedrich Heinrich von der Hagen's *Gesamtabenteuer*, this *maere* is still ascribed to Konrad von Würzburg, but in recent years there have been serious doubts about Konrad's authorship. On the question of authorship, see Norbert R. Wolf, "Die halbe Birne A," in *Deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*, vol. 3, ed. Kurt Ruh et al. (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1981), 404-5.

Ein altiu diu begunde springen
 hôhe alsam ein kitze enbor: si wollte bluomen bringen
 "tohter, reich mir mî gewant:
 ich muoz an eines knappen hant,
 der ist von Riuwental genant.
 traranuretun traranureriruntundeie."
 [...]

Dô sprachs' ein alte in ir geile:
 "trûtgespil. wol dan mit mir! ja ergât ez uns ze heile.
 wir suln beid nâch bluomen gân.
 war umbe solte ich hie bestân,
 sît ich sô vil geverten hân?
 traranuretun traranuriruntundeie."

Neidhart, (Haupt-Wiesner 3,1)⁴⁵

[An old woman started to jump like a young goat, she wanted to deliver flowers. "Daughter, pass me my best dress! I have to hold the hand of a young knight who is called von Riuwental. Traran" [...] Then an old woman said in her exuberance: "Beloved girl-friend, please go with me! We will certainly be lucky. Let's go after flowers. Why should I stay here if I have so many girl-

⁴⁵Neidhart, "Sommerlied (Haupt-Wiesner 3,1; ATB Sommerlied 1)," in *Neidhart von Reuental: Lieder*, trans. and ed. Helmut Lomnitzer (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1984), 8-11.

friends? Traran..."]

Yet, while Neidhart's "love-mad" old hags serve only as a source of ridicule, the old woman depicted in *Alten Weibes List* achieves more than that. She is less vulnerable on the physical, sexual level, since her only desire is not to make love, but to make money out of love, the love of others. The fact that she is officially the keeper of a small shop serves to emphasize her business-like approach to life: she deals not only in commodities, but in human sexuality, too, or, in other words, she reduces human sexuality to a commodity. Her very name, "vrouw mez," strengthens this connection between sexuality and material gain: "Mez" typically denotes a girl of a lower class and often implies the meaning "whore." The "whore" now stands for the most direct relationship between money and sexuality. I do not want to speculate about what her name might imply to the text's audience about "vrouw mez's" possible activities in her younger days, although it is obvious that she does not act as a harlot any longer. At the same time, her name and occupation indicate that in contrast to many of her customers, "vrouw mez" belongs to the lower classes. Thus her status as a woman, as a member of the lower class and as a crone makes her one of the threefold "other" women discussed above.

The story proper starts one morning at mass shortly before Whitsun in a church in Würzburg. "Vrouw mez," temporarily out of "customers," decides that a little prompting is needed in order to get her business going. Having taken stock of the church-goers, she chooses the "tuombrobt von Rôtenstein" [the dean of the cathedral of Rotenstein] as a likely candidate, and approaches him with the fabricated story that a beautiful noblewoman is in love with him. The "tuombrobt" is only too willing to find out more about his mysterious

lover, and he "hires" the old woman to mediate between himself and the noblewoman with the promise of a reward, and even gives her some money in advance. It takes the woman little time to find an appropriate noblewoman, whom she approaches with a similar fabricated story about an anonymous lover. Not surprisingly, in this case, too, money changes hands. The money provides the old woman with a certain amount of power, yet her actual power stems from her orchestration of the love affair, her manipulation of two people from a higher social class than her own. In the relationship between "vrouw mez" and the "tuombrobst" there is a shift of power that defies not only the laws of gender, but also those of class. Driven by his desire, the "tuombrobst" willingly submits to the old woman's dictates, thereby relinquishing some of his male social and sexual superiority. In calling the old woman "liebiu muoter mîn" [my dear mother; v. 79] the "tuombrobst" expresses his respect for her greater wisdom in matters of sexuality. By the same token, the old woman's knowledge of male nature and of human sexuality releases her from the confinements of gender and social background, granting her a position of power and respect unusual for her gender, age and social status.

Yet while the "tuombrobst" values the old woman for her expertise, the narrator's opinion on her specific wisdom in matters of human sexuality is firmly negative. Although the reader might detect something approaching grudging admiration on the part of the narrator, the message he wants to convey is that the events described are ridiculous at the least, and sometimes perverse. According to the narrator, the motive underlying the old woman's actions is her "bôsheit" [badness], and she is later described as "diu valsche vnreine" [the wrong, unclean one]. In the same tone, her match-making skills are discredited as

"mangen hüpschen list, / der gemenlich zu hoeren ist" [many a pretty trick that is disgraceful to hear]. The reader is led to assume that only the old woman's personal, negative traits are the motor of her actions, and that her sole desire is personal satisfaction through the accumulation of the money earned so dishonourably.

However, the old woman's reaction on receipt of the first installment of her payment from the "tuombrobt" indicates that it is less the greed for luxury than financial pressures that might be responsible for her status as "hechlerin." Verses 174-182 describe how she hurries home to prepare some nice food for the Whitsun-holidays--only to be compared to a "tahs," i.e. a badger, by the narrator. The badger's German name is derived from MHG "dehsen" [to dig] and points to his habit of digging and burrowing. He lives lonely in subterranean caves, and the German writers of the 13th century emphasize his cunning and sneaking.⁴⁶ Even though the comparison between the old woman and the badger is unflattering, it seems accurate at first glance. The way in which she sneaks into the life and trust of the "tuombrobt" and the noblewoman, as well as her cunning in sexual matters, reminds one of the badger. However, the connection is in many respects superficial and does not take into account the probable reasons for the woman's behaviour. After the match between the "tuombrobt" and the noblewoman has been made, we hear that the old woman is obviously living all by herself in her house. When she offers the lovers her house for the consummation of the love-affair, no possible husband or other relative seems to be in the way. For this reason, it might be assumed that the old woman was either never married or is

⁴⁶"Dachs," in Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, vol. 2 (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1860), 666.

widowed and thus forced to somehow make her own living, and that her occupation as match-maker and advisor in secret sexual matters serves to supplement the income from her little shop. Her living like a badger might have economic and social reasons, being the result of the limited possibilities open to old women from the lower classes. What Ruth Mazo Karras remarks with respect to the medieval prostitute seems to hold true for the match-maker, too, namely that financial pressures, although often responsible for a woman's drift into these occupations, do not seem to be considered in medieval literary representations of these despised and marginalized women:

Awareness of the importance of commerce did not imply an understanding of how the money economy contributed to sexual exploitation; it merely led to the condemnation of the prostitute's avarice.⁴⁷

In the case of the female prostitute, as of the match-maker, feminine greed, financial and sexual, is held responsible for her female's dealing in bodies, be it her own or those of others.

Moreover, in *Alten Weibes List* the old woman's greed is symbolized not only by her interest in receiving monetary rewards for her "sexual" services but, on a more direct, "carnal" level, by the connection the text makes between the negotiation of sexuality, the exchange of money and the preparation of food. The "tuombrobst's" arrangements aiming at the satisfaction of the sins of the flesh are paralleled by the old woman's preparation of a good meal, her substitute for the satisfaction of sexual desires. Thus, her arrangements for food may be read on two levels, a social and a sexual one.

⁴⁷Ruth Mazo Karras, "Sex, Money, and Prostitution in Medieval English Culture," in *Desire and Discipline: Sex and Sexuality in the Premodern West*, ed. Jacqueline Murray and Konrad Eisenbichler (Toronto, Buffalo, London: U of Toronto Press, 1996), 206.

In this *maere*, the love is never consummated. Despite the old woman's cleverness and careful preparations, she is doomed to fail because of God's will. While, as the narrator explains, the devil by his very nature strives for "schande" [shame/shameful deeds], it is God's task to prevent him from executing his evil intentions (v. 45-48). In this context the old woman is not only identified as a tool of the devil but is later called "vâlandin" [she-devil] herself (v. 372). The by now familiar equation of the "other" woman with the devil applies also in this text. Despite her physical integration into medieval society, "vrou mez" is spiritually as far removed from Christian society as the Wild Woman or the heathen women.

Nonetheless, although God's intervention ruins her plans, the female non-Christian "other" herself escapes comparatively unscathed. When God arranges for the "tuombrobt" to be called away at the very moment when he is ready to follow "vrou mez" to the promised rendezvous in her house, she makes the mistake of choosing the noblewoman's husband as a willing substitute. This mistake might offer her up for laughter, but she still suffers comparatively less than the noblewoman or her husband/lover. Interestingly, it is again female cunning that saves the situation. As the noblewoman watches stunned and horrified as her own husband approaches the old woman's house, her lady-in-waiting suggests that she should act as the righteous wife who has been lying in wait for her unfaithful husband. The plan proves successful, and while the husband receives a beating from his "enraged" wife, "vrou mez" chooses to leave the place of battle between the genders silently .

Even though the old woman's plans fail then, she has managed not only to create some chaos in the town of Würzburg, but to present the protagonists with a picture of their own weaknesses and shortcomings. Not only are the men and the woman revealed as morally

corrupt, but the institution of marriage appears faulty, too. Nobody is immune to the old woman's cunning: neither pious men nor husbands and wives. There is no doubt that as a mediator between men and women, "vrou mez" does wield a certain amount of power. Every successful match is a testimony to her knowledge of people and their desires and to her skills in exploiting these desires to her own advantage.

Yet although the old woman in her role as procurer or match-maker seems to work against patriarchy and its institution of marriage by arranging or rearranging sexual relationships between men and women occupying different positions in society, her seemingly disruptive machinations turn out to be less subversive than they appear at first glance. As a closer look reveals, neither gender-roles nor the process of the exchange of women are really disrupted. What the old woman solicits are traditional heterosexual relationships. Even though individual partners are swapped, the *status quo* is never threatened. Furthermore, the narrator puts the old woman in the position of the primary culprit for the sexual trespasses of others. We should not forget that, despite the willingness of her clients, the narrator blames first and foremost the old woman's "list" for the deterioration of sexual morals. The sheer amount of pejoratives he uses with respect to her ensures that the audiences never forget whom he holds responsible for the sexual transgressions happening in her house. Even though, unlike the earlier discussed "other" women, she does not seduce with her own body, she is, nonetheless, a seductress. It is "vrou mez" who leads her victims into temptation by offering them a way to the gates of the garden of forbidden desires. Like the Biblical snake, she incites her victims to taste forbidden fruit. And, like the "other" women discussed above, she, too, bases her power over men on her

knowledge of sexuality, one of the primary weapons of the devil, in whose service she is supposed to stand.

Thus, even though the old woman may wield some power on a small scale, a power for which she is damned by the narrator, she is, ultimately, an instrument of medieval patriarchal society no less than any other woman. While on the textual level all of the participants seem to gain from her transactions--the lovers because of the help they receive in satisfying their illicit sexual desires, and the old woman because of the money she earns -- the *maere* as such ultimately serves medieval patriarchy by introducing the female "other" as a convenient scapegoat for the moral trespasses occurring in everyday medieval society.

b) *Die Halbe Birn*

*Die Halbe Birn*⁴⁸ relates how a young princess rejects all her suitors and one day drives away a certain *Freiherr* Arnold in disgrace because of his improper table-manners. Expected to share a pear with the princess, Arnold not only fails to peel it, but devours his own half before even offering the princess her share. Having returned to his own country, the shamed *Freiherr* plans revenge and, following the advice of one of his friends, returns to the princess's court disguised as a fool. In this disguise, he spends his days at the court and his nights in front of the princess's bedchamber until one night the opportunity for revenge arises.

⁴⁸Konrad von Würzburg, "Die halbe Birn," in *Gesamtabenteuer*, vol. 1., 207-224.

He is ordered into the princess's chamber to entertain her and her female entourage. This entertainment, starting with some harmless joking and jesting, quickly changes its nature when the young man's nature interferes and "sin vil lang geschirre" [his very long equipment; v. 258] reaches its full size. The princess, aflame with lust, orders all her maidens out of the chamber save Irmengart, her old chamber-maid.

Like "vrou mez" in *Alten Weibes List*, Irmengart is adept in "heimelichen sachen," in secret knowledge in sexual matters. And Irmengart, too, assists in the establishment of a sexual encounter, thereby entering into a relationship with Arnold, a man she would not normally meet in a sexually charged scene. The triangular relationship between two sexually involved young people and an old woman who assists in one way or the other is brought to the most direct physical level, thus adding to the "obscenity" of *Die Halbe Birn*. Irmengart acts as the mediator, and although she is not one of the main protagonists of the text, she becomes the main motor of the sexual encounter. Since Arnold, the fool, pretends not to know what kind of service the princess wants him so urgently to perform, and since the young woman herself is still inexperienced in sexual matters, it is Irmengart who has to orchestrate the sexual encounter. As the text relates in detail, Irmengart not only positions the partners in bed but literally conducts the ensuing sexual intercourse with the help of a stick:

"Gerne, frouwe," sprach diu maget

mîn dienst ist iu unversaget."

Si nam den vil tumben slûch

und leit in û ir [=the princess's] linden bûch

Und druhte in zwischen ir bein:

noch da lag er unde grein,
 Als ein alter hovewart,
 biz diu frouwe Irmengart
 Einen stap erkripfete
 und mit der gerte stipfete,
 Der kom ir dâ ze heile,
 des tôren hinderteile
 gap si stich über stich,
 bis er begunde regen sich . . .

Die halbe Birn, v. 359-72

["With pleasure, my dear lady," said the maid. "I won't refuse you my service." She took the flaccid tube and laid it on the princess's soft belly and pressed it down between her legs. Yet he lay there and howled like an old dog until the lady Irmengart took a stick and pricked him with the tip. The stick came in quite handy, for she gave the fool's bottom prick after prick until he started to move.]

The princess's refrain-like command "Stipfe, maget Irmengart, / durch dîne wîplîche art, / diu von geburt erbet dich, / sô reget aber der tôre sich" ["Prick, maid Irmengart, because of your feminine way that you have inherited by birth, so that the fool starts to move;" v. 381-84] adds not only a kind of obscene rhythm to this concert of love, but also sado-masochistic undertones. The stick that the old woman uses in order to get the young man into rhythm functions like a conductor's baton. Irmengart's "leading position" is emphasized by the fact

that neither of the others seems to know what to do in this situation. Arnold's relationship with the old woman is so close that it is literally inscribed on his body. Not only does the "other" woman participate in his sexual encounter with the princess, but she leaves her mark on one of his most private body-parts, namely his exposed backside. While the princess turns out to be the most powerless party, physically dominated by Arnold, and intellectually dependent on Irmengart, Arnold and the "other" woman engage in a gender struggle of sorts.

The text attempts to portray Arnold as the real master of the situation, symbolized by his own version of the "coitus interruptus," when he stops his movements shortly before either of them reaches an orgasm. He does this several times, which leads the princess to repeat her refrain-like command to the old woman over and again: "Stipfe, maget Irmengart ..." However, I would like to suggest that Arnold's refusal to complete the intercourse may have other implications, too, signifying less his mastery of the situation, than his own masochistic tendencies to submit to the repeated beatings of the old woman, who emerges as his actual partner in this sexual exchange.

After Arnold has revealed his identity, it is again Imengart whose help is needed and who advises the princess to "cut her losses" by marrying Arnold. As in *Alten Weibes List*, this *maere* allows the old woman to escape unscathed, whereas the princess and Arnold are forced into a marriage none of them comes to enjoy. Her immunity to the results of the actions in which she takes an important part, makes the old woman in *Alten Weibes List* and *Die Halbe Birn* appear a dangerous and powerful "other," especially because she lives a seemingly inconspicuous life in medieval society.

2. Conclusions

In all the investigated encounters between the male (Christian) Self and the female (non-Christian) "other," the woman's "otherness" is linked to her sexuality. The "other" woman's unique power over the life of the man she meets often takes the form of sexual seduction. It is through their sexuality that the supernatural woman, the heathen woman and the Wild Woman try to lure their male "victims" out of the realm of medieval Christian civilization. In a similar way, it is by means of sexuality, though not her own, that the old woman arranges illicit relationships between the sexes. In the encounters between Christian knights and "supernatural" women, heathen women and Wild Women, it emerges that the "other" woman, despite her seemingly disruptive role, is not permitted to pose any ultimate threat to medieval Christian civilization. Even though all the texts present their audience with at times alluring, at times dangerous, images of untamed femininity, they at the same time portray a number of strategies that successfully "neutralize" the "other" woman's power. Gender role reversal appears as an, often eroticized, possibility that is, nevertheless, ultimately precluded. What Lisa Bitel points out with respect to the "warriors, hags and sheelangs" in Early Irish Literature holds true for medieval German texts and their audience:

Despite all sorts of limits on women's authority and status and despite the very real and constant risk of violence to women, the men and women of early Ireland were fascinated by a veritable pornography of powerful females. Their stories of women warriors, war goddesses, and witches included everything

modern pornographers offer their audiences: sex, violence, and political conflict, with magic thrown in to mark this peculiarly premodern genre. The early Irish were obsessed with arms-bearing woman warriors in contest with men, otherworldly *dominatrices* demanding sex from handsome heroes, insolent queens ordering soldiers around, or--best of all--any of these ill-humored females being beaten in combat or sexually subdued by other warriors.⁴⁹

The old woman, on the other hand, seems to exercise a more powerful role. Even though in both of the analyzed *maeren* her plans are ultimately frustrated, she escapes relatively unscathed from her encounters with men. As mentioned above, with the old woman, sexuality takes a different, more indirect form. It is less her body than her unique knowledge of the secrets of sexuality, her "list," that gives her an advantage over men. Reading the two *maeren* against the grain, one could, of course, wonder about the "true" nature of the old woman's power. I would argue that her "list" is less a demonic gift than the collected wisdom of a woman's life. The fact the old woman's "list" is based so strongly on sexuality may be explained by the fact that sexuality and procreation were the medieval woman's intimate metier. Her life as wife and mother provided her with sufficient opportunity to acquire valuable knowledge about the "carnal" side of human life. However, the two *maeren* depict the cunning old woman in their midst as being just as dangerous as the "other" women living outside the realm of civilization.

⁴⁹Lisa M. Bitel, *Land of Women: Tales of Sex and Gender from Early Ireland* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1996), 204.

All the texts examined in this part of the thesis portray women whose general Otherness is doubled by their individual "deviance." What makes these women especially valuable material for medieval pornography are their seemingly limitless resources. While the women analyzed in the earlier parts of this thesis, despite their sometimes considerable power and their alleged connection with the devil, have to remain in the realm of the natural, no such restrictions apply to "other" women. Their unique power puts the man in an especially vulnerable position. It is in encounters with "other" women that men cannot rely on their masculine resources any longer and have to draw on the help of the Christian God, who, in accordance with his patriarchal character, takes the side of the man in his struggle against the forces of femininity. If one considers that the "other" women are often portrayed as "heathens" or are associated with the devil, the relationship between the male Christian Self and the female non-Christian "other" reflects the Biblical struggle between the forces of good and evil. In addition to messages on the construction of gender and on the relationship of power between the genders, the audience of these texts is presented with an important religious moral, namely that the medieval man should never lose his faith in a merciful Christian God--especially when he is "out there," alone, in the (sexual) wilderness, the realm of the dangerous female "other."

RESULTS

This thesis argues that insights from feminist scholarship and gender studies may lead to new readings of medieval German literature. I have shown that contemporary theories may help readers to re-examine a medieval text's implications and ethical values, as well as to reconsider traditional views of the text. My readings have confirmed that the relationship between the genders appears in a different light when analyzed from a feminist perspective, and that female figures that have previously received negative treatment in the medieval text as well as in the critical literature can often be evaluated in a new, more positive way. One of the most salient examples of this kind of re-evaluation was seen to be given by the infamous "trouble-maker" Brünhild in the *Nibelungenlied*, who in my interpretation has been transformed from an arrogant woman who has to be put in her place to a woman who rightfully refuses to shed her "masculine" physical traits and the position of power her "masculinity" grants her in her relationship with men.

By choosing the issues of gender and power as its focus, this study has brought together a number of seemingly diverse texts that reveal different aspects of the literary negotiation of masculinity and femininity and the power relationship between the genders, texts that might otherwise have been overlooked or regarded as isolated incidents. The aim of this thesis has been to present various case studies and to document them side by side in order to map an intellectual landscape allowing the reader to pinpoint some of the cultural attitudes toward the issues of gender and power presented in medieval German literature.

As demonstrated in Part One, the discussion of gender boundaries plays an important

part in fictional as well as didactic literature. My readings of two didactic texts, Sebastian Brant's *Narrenschiff* and Thomasin von Zerclaere's *Der welsche Gast*, as well as of five fictional texts, namely the *Nibelungenlied*, *Wolfdietrich B*, Ulrich von Liechtenstein's *Frauendienst*, Dietrich von der Glezze's *Der Gürtel* and *Beringer*, have shown that violations of gender boundaries and the questioning of the traditional power relationship between the genders are crucial to the textual negotiation of masculinity and femininity. Not only does the blurring of gender boundaries violate medieval Christian codes of masculine and feminine conduct, but it also upsets the established, Biblical power relationship between men and women. Even though the eight texts examined in the first part of the thesis were seen to employ different strategies to deal with violations of gender norms, all of them depict these violations as only temporary aberrations from a proclaimed normative standard. At the same time, however, it has emerged from my interpretations that the necessity for Biblical injunctions against the violation of gender norms, as well as their discussion and re-enforcement in medieval literature, indicate that the concepts of masculinity and femininity are not as "natural" as the authors of texts themselves attempt to convey.

The traditional unequal relationship between the genders is especially important for the system of male homosocial bonding underlying medieval society. As I have demonstrated in Part Two of the thesis, male homosocial bonding is based on the availability of women as gifts to be exchanged between men. Woman's role as object of exchange between male partners in social transactions is significant for the power relationship between the genders. Even though this exchange can take different forms, the woman in all cases plays the passive role of the gift that is given by one man to another. My examples of the physical and

symbolic exchange of women and their favours, taken from two didactic texts, *Der Große Seelentrost* and Marquard vom Stein's *Der Ritter vom Turn*, as well as from three fictional texts, the *Nibelungenlied*, *Kudrun*, and Hartmann von Aue's *Iwein*, indicate that aspects of this exchange are not solely related to medieval marriage practices, but are also reflected in courtly rituals, such as "frouwen schouwen." My analysis of the ritual of "frouwen schouwen" has provided a troubling view of the female body as a site of male voyeuristic pleasure, playing an important part in interactions between men. Nevertheless, it also emerged from my readings that the process that objectifies women may at the same time be a potential source of female power. The need to prepare a young woman for her role as an object of exchange, and the severity with which violations of proper female behaviour are punished, show the importance of women and their bodies for the functioning of male homosocial bonds. I have demonstrated in *Der Ritter vom Turn* that a father's ability or failure to supply society with marriageable daughters defines his own position in the male homosocial system. This means that even in their function as passive tokens of exchange women possess a certain disruptive power and sometimes use this power when attempting to escape their preordained role as objects on the marriage market and as mere tokens in the relationship between men.

The importance of the traditionally beautiful female body as an object of exchange between men was further highlighted in the relationships between Christian knights and women who are perceived as strange or unattractive -- the focus Part Three of the thesis. The six texts analyzed in this last section have demonstrated how the negotiation of gender and power assumes a new dimension in light of male encounters with Wild Women, heathen women, supernatural women and old women, where the male partner often has to struggle to

defend not only his privileged masculine position, but sometimes also his very masculinity. The "other" woman, as she appeared in *Der Ritter von Staufenberg*, *Wolfdietrich B*, the *Eckenlied*, *Alten Weibes List*, *Die halbe Birn* and Der Stricker's *Die Königin vom Mohrenland*, even though she is located outside the system of male exchange, nevertheless fulfils an important function in the texts. On the one hand, the notions of danger and attractiveness attached to the "other" woman caters to male erotic fantasies. On the other hand, however, the texts point to the dangers presented by the untamed, "other" woman and emphasize the necessity of regulating and controlling female behaviour as well as the relationship of power between the genders.

Although the texts analyzed in the three parts of the thesis represent only a small sample of medieval German literature, they reflect the diverse literary discourse on masculinity and femininity and on the power relationship between the genders in the Middle Ages. It has become clear that all of the texts examined not only deal with these issues but at the same time attempt to regulate transgressive acts, be they committed by men or women. Yet even though on the surface the texts are ultimately affirmative in their gender politics, they nevertheless conjure up images of deviant behaviour and, as I have argued, they do not always manage to control the effect of their depictions on the imagination of their audience. No reader will deny that violations of norms are an important component of an interesting story. Images of deviant men, evil women and "perverse" relationships will linger on in the reader's imagination--and with them the "pleasure" that depictions of transgressive acts, whether they are social or sexual, provide for the reader. It is the pleasure of the "un-natural," the forbidden, that arrests the reader's or listener's attention in the first place. And even

though these dangerous images are usually "neutralized" in the end, they nevertheless do not lose their pleasurable disturbing power over the mind of the reader. Furthermore, on an intellectual level, the gender role reversal depicted in many of these texts points to possible alternative roles for men and women. Medieval texts in their sheer reductiveness allow us to see more clearly the ways in which the concepts of masculinity and femininity are constantly re-negotiated than the often more sophisticated works of modern literature. The at times brutally straightforward depictions of gender relationships that we have found in many texts act as a mirror that in distorted form reflects contemporary gender arrangements and thereby prompts us to rethink the --sometimes similar, sometimes different-- ways in which men and women today share their world.

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